CROSSGEN COMICS
MERIDIAN™
1
JULY
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Barbara Kesel • Joshua Middleton • Dexter Vines • Michael Atiyeh

This place grows colder, my friend. Its energy wanes.

I am seeking a solution, and eagerly welcome your thoughts.

It is not like you to be so troubled.

So long ago, when it was all set in motion, it was so... fascinating in its complexity. It surprised even me. Now things are static, worlds grow cold, and what were once glorious fields of battle lay still and barren.

The problem is not simply lazy warriors. The vital energies on which we all depend are fading away... it shouldn't happen like this... yet it is! It is dying, and the First do *nothing* to prevent it!

Because the First don't understand. They have no idea of the connection between their actions and the Whole.

Yes. They need... motivation. They must be forced to reignite the cycle...

Yet...they know nothing of my existence. To do so would *change* them...

Why look only to the First?

There are many worlds open to you, so many people...

If you were to step in quietly -- walk among them. Then a subtle touch, to add just a small mark of your passage -- a sign.

Your sign.

Imagine... each world, one soul, marked with the sigil. Opened to the power.

Why just one?

I was thinking in terms of efficiency. The number is unimportant. A small number makes for a clear burden on each; too many, and they let someone else do the work.

As we have already seen with the First. Still...

Come...

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Where are we?

On the edges of the Bleak Zone. The very spot where it all seems to die away. This world itself is a thing of rare beauty ravaged by the changes of time. A pearl delicately poised on the edge of an abyss.

It has survived one cataclysm and its people thrive in the resulting sky cities. Managing a tender balance between the resources available to them and their own desire to possess more.

A single Sigil-Bearer would disrupt that balance. *Two* would preserve the tension...

Two siblings, this time... I think...

What will I tell them, these... *Sigil-Bearers?*

Give them no warning. No direction: let their actions dictate the flare of the Sigil.

This will reenergize your warriors. Bring them back to their purpose. Have them fight off the chill of their current ennui.

You mean Cross-Generation.
Yes. Power from conflict. Energy creating energy.
As the new ones work toward their own definition, they serve your needs.
I tell you, you could start a new chain of creation to stoke the cooling fires of the Whole.
I feel it growing warmer already.

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LETTERER

The CrossGen Universe created by Mark Alessi and Gina M. Villa

You can tell when some things are about to happen--
-- you can feel it.
Others slip by.
You just don't realize things are about to change.
Forever.
I wish I'd had some warning that day.
Hmmm. THERE'S THREE MORE SHIPS THAN USUAL.

...so I could have said goodbye.
CADADOR DOESN'T USUALLY SEND SO MANY...
THEIR LAST TRADE RUN MUST HAVE BEEN *FANTASTICALLY* SUCCESSFUL.

CADADOR ALWAYS WINS IN TRADE, SEPHIE.
NO MATTER WHAT IT TAKES
JAD...
YOU KNOW ILAHN IS MY UNCLE...
DON'T PUT SEPHIE IN AN AWKWARD SPOT, SON
STU -- YOU SEE THAT WOBBLE?
THOSE SHIPS HAVE BEEN MODIFIED FROM THEIR ORIGINAL FLOAT PATTERNS
SLOPPY WORK. NOT OURS
OF COURSE NOT! NO SHIP LEAVES MERIDIAN UNTIL IT PASSES FATHER'S FIRST RULE: "MAKE IT PERFECT TO THE EYE AND SOUND TO THE TOUCH"
CAN'T YOU JUST HEAR HIM SAYING...
WHOOPS!
SEE YOU AT THE RECEPTION!

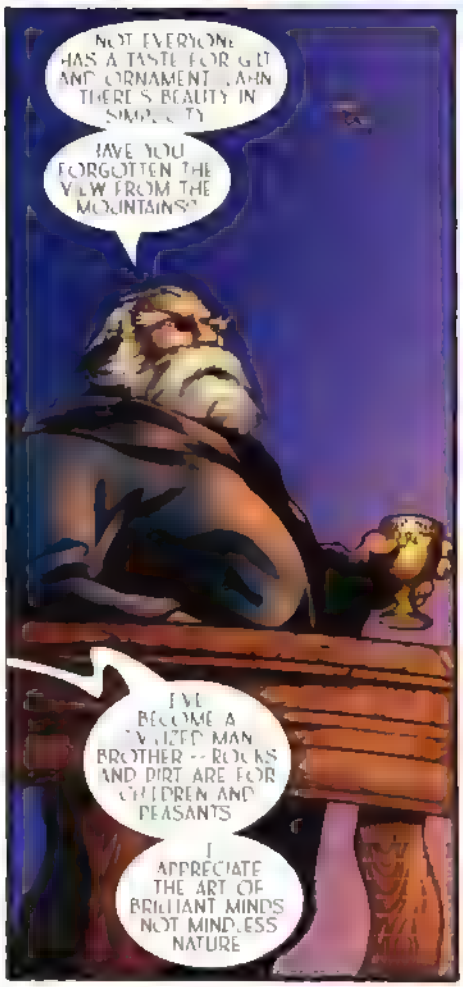
SORRY, PAPA, BUT I WAS PERSONALLY INSPECTING --
NO
I WAS SUPERVISING THE LANDING AND --
NO
I FORGOT
SCUSE ME, CRIT --
SKEE SKEE SKEE
-- BUT THE HIGH ROAD'S THE QUICKEST!
This is what I'll always remember of Meridian

Little memories. My house
My room
...my freedom...
HI, FEABIE! HI, ZOUKA!
I'M HOME!
LATE AGAIN
SUCH A SURPRISE!
SEPHIE, YOU'RE AS CONSTANT AS THE STARS
WE HAVE TO STAY UP LATE TO SEE THEM, TOO!
SHE KNEW MINISTER ILAHN WAS VISITING TODAY
BUT SHE JUST HAD TO SEE JAD
DID NOT!

and, most of all, my father
PAPA! I M READY!
HO! LOOK AT YOU!
MY LITTLE SQUIRREL HAS TRANSFORMED INTO A BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WOMAN
SO LIKE YOUR MOTHER
Oh, MY SWEET SEPHIE...
SHE WOULD BE SO PROUD OF YOU
THANK YOU, PAPA I LOVE YOU
AND I YOU, PRECIOUS
LET S GO SHOW OFF FOR MY LITTLE BROTHER, SHALL WE?

MY LORD MINISTER!
PRESENTING ILAHN, MINISTER OF CADADOR!
STOP BARKING LIKE AN OVER-ZEALOUS HERALD REGOR. THEY KNOW WHO I AM
ILAHN! HOW FARES THE LAND OF CADADOR?
FORGIVE ME MY EXUBERANCE, ILAHN... MY PRIDE IS OVERFLOWING!
JUST LOOK AT OUR SEPHIL TODAY!
GREETINGS UNTIL
COME, LET US STEAL A LITTLE TIME ALONE BEFORE I LOSE YOU TO TABLE TALK!

AH, QUAINT AS EVER
TUROS... I'LL NEVER UNDERSTAND MERIDIAN IS WEALTHY ENOUGH
WHY CAN'T YOU RAZE THESE HOVELS AND BUILD SOMETHING MAGNIFICENT?


NOT EVERYONE HAS A TASTE FOR GILT AND ORNAMENT, CAHN. THERE'S BEAUTY IN SIMPLICITY.
HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN THE VIEW FROM THE MOUNTAINS?
I'VE BECOME A WIZENED MAN, BROTHER -- ROCKS AND DIRT ARE FOR CHILDREN AND PEASANTS.
I APPRECIATE THE ART OF BRILLIANT MINDS, NOT MINDLESS NATURE.

WE MUST AGREE TO DISAGREE, THEN. CAHN TO YOUR HEALTH.
AND YOURS. I'VE HEARD YOU ARE UNWELL?

I'VE KEPT IT QUIET. MY PHYSICIANS AIN'T FIND A CAUSE.
IN HONESTY, BROTHER... I'M AFRAID BUT I'M NOT WILLING TO SEND MY ASHES TO THE WIND JUST YET.
GIVEN YOUR CONCERNS, PERHAPS YOU'LL RECONSIDER MY OFFER TO COMBINE MERIDIAN AND CAPADOR?

THE PEOPLE OF MERIDIAN ARE TOO DIFFERENT FROM YOURS IN CAPADOR. WE ARE CRAFTSMEN, NOT MERCHANTS.
IT MIGHT BE GOOD FOR OUR PURSES, BUT IT WOULDN'T BE GOOD FOR OUR SOULS.
I MUST DECLINE ILAHN AGAIN AND ALWAYS.
DAMN YOUR STUBBORN HIDE! THINK, TUROS!
IS A PASSIVE, BACKWARD STATE A FITTING LEGACY FOR YOUR CHILD?
THIS SHORT-SIGHTEDNESS OF YOURS IS COSTING US BOTH!
I WON'T ALLOW IT!
YOU ARE FORCING ME TO ACKKK
GET AWAY!
STOP! IT'S JUST A
BIRD?
If Papa hadn't been so [illegible] everything could have been so different

As it was, Papa was weak.
When it happened
whatever it was that did happen
GYAAUGH!
It was just too much
AAAK-
TUROS? THAT CREATURE WHAT HAS IT DONE?!
TUROS?
PAPA?

NOTHING, YOU FOOL!
HELP HIM!
HELP HIM!
UNGH
PAPA!!
As Papa slipped away I seemed to follow him until all that was left was us and there was nothing I could do to save him

I knew that no matter what he would always be with me
I wanted that moment to last forever
but then it was over
and he was gone
SEPHIL? OH YOU POOR DEAR

TAK TAK TAK
NOW THAT
I'VE BEEN LOYAL
UNSTOPPABLE
POWER
POWER

it exploded
right at me
then it flowed through me
I was filled with its warmth
suddenly I felt protected
I woke up realizing
I was, somehow, safe

SEPHIE!
KRAAAK
YOU THERE!
GET AWAY FROM HER!
BUT
UNCLE ALAIN!
NOOOO!

YOU KNOW HIM
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, CHILD?
DID HE HARM YOU?
NO
UNCLE ELA IN I KNOW HIM
THAT'S REGOR
HE'S PAPA'S STEWARD
WHY WOULD HE
HOW COULD S
HE TRIED TO KILL YOU BECAUSE HE WAS ORDERED TO DO SO
YOU ARE IN DANGER IF YOU STAY IN MERIDIAN

SEPH, LISTEN TO ME
ONE OF THE HOUSE STAFF PROVED FALSE
CAN YOU BE SURE YOU CAN TRUST ANY OF THE OTHERS?
COME WITH ME NOW
I WILL USE EVERY POWER I POSSESS TO PROTECT YOU

I wish I'd thought to look back to see everything one more time the way it was
but in my memories it's still beautiful
SEE THAT SHE IS MADE COMFORTABLE AND SECURE ABOARD THE SHIP I'LL BE ALONG SOON
AND WHAT OF YOUR LARDER ORDERS LORD MINISTER?
WAIT UNTIL MORNING
WHEN THE FIRE BURNS DOWN DO IT THEN

HASTIAN
NO MA'AM
WE'VE BEEN THROUGH THE ENTIRE PLACE
SHE MIGHT
WASN'T
WE DON'T KNOW WHERE SHE WENT
NO TUROS
IT'S LIKE THE HEART'S BEEN TORN FROM MERIDIAN

STILL AWAKE?
THIS DAY HAS BEEN DOOMED TRAGIC BUT IT'S OVER YOU'RE SAFE
RUST NOW

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Far away...

on the world of Demetria, explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these islands, moving goods between them via floating ships built from trees that absorbed the same buoyant ore that keeps the islands aloft

One of these city-states is Meridian, which specializes in shipbuilding. Meridian is the home of Sephie, 16-year-old daughter of Minister Turos. All her life has been spent being groomed to take over the ruling of Meridian someday. Sephie is down at the docks trying to get Jad's attention when five ships come in from Cadador, a neighboring island ruled by Turos' younger brother Ilahn.

Ilahn and Turos meet privately to discuss Turos' mysterious illness and Ilahn's request to combine the two islands' economies. Cadador is richer and more ruthless than Meridian, so Turos declines. Ilahn is furious, but his tirade is interrupted when they are engulfed by light and left with mysterious marks. The shock is too much for Turos, who suffers a fatal heart attack. Sephie arrives in time to witness a strange farewell from her father and finds that his sigil has transferred to her.

Ilahn takes advantage of Turos' death by taking charge. After discovering that the mark endows him with power, he secretly orders an attack on Sephie, arriving in time to "save" her. With her own power, Sephie has already saved herself, but Ilahn kills her attacker, who is revealed to be one of the house staff. Ilahn tells Sephie she can trust no one as he whisks her away to Cadador. Using his power, he sets a fire to cover their disappearance.

Meanwhile, Sephie's friends escape the fire, wondering sadly where she has gone as Ilahn tells his soldiers: "Wait until morning. Do it then..."

Meridian™ ... FIRST PRINTING ... Meridian™ CrossGen™ and the CrossGen sigil ™ ... PRINTED IN CANADA

On Meridian, we kept true to the old ways
Other cities rushed to grow, adding ore pod's to their bottoms so they could add mass topside
but we preferred to keep things in balance
"When need and want in balance rest, tension is barred And work is best"

THANKS ROBIN
CAPADORS SPRING QUITE AN ARMY ON US, OH BOY?
YOU'RE TELLING ME
THEY'RE EVERYWHERE AND I HAVE TO GET TO SEPH TO THE MINISTER'S RESIDENCE!
I'LL STAY CLEAR OF THE STREETS. THEY'RE ROUNDING UP EVERYONE
BUT THERE'S ALWAYS SEPHIE'S ROAD

Cadador, on the other hand
WHAT? ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT MERIDIAN?
I HAVE TO GO HOME

HOME? RESP
YOU DO HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO MERIDIAN. TO STAY HERE IN TADADOR
TO LEARN TO GROW TO BECOME A GREAT MINISTER
IF YOU GO HOME NOW YOU PUT MERIDIAN IN THE HANDS OF AN AMATEUR
A MINISTER UNSCHOOLED IN THE TRICKS OF TRADE
IS THAT THE RESPONSIBLE THING TO DO?
N
YOU'RE LEARNING ALREADY GOOD GIRL
HERE'S WHAT WILL HAPPEN
YOU REMAIN MINISTER IN EXILE

WE PLACE A REGENT TO MAINTAIN ORDER AND PRODUCTION
AND FERRET OUT TRAITORS YOUR WOULD BE ASSASSIN MAY NOT HAVE ACTED ALONE!
DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY ANYONE WOULD WANT TO HURT ME
SEPHIE! THE MINUTE YOUR FATHER DIED YOU BECAME A TARGET!
DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA HOW MUCH WEALTH MERIDIAN REPRESENTS?
YOU INHERIT BUT UNLESS YOU HAVE THE POWER BASE TO ASSERT YOUR RULE
THERE ARE ALWAYS THOSE WHO WOULD TAKE IT AWAY FROM YOU BY ANY MEANS
AND UNTIL WE DETERMINE WHO DID THAT ATTACK ON YOUR LIFE
YOUR SAFER HERE

HEY!!!
THERE! ON THE ROOF!
DON'T LOSE THIS ONE! WE NEED TO KNOW HOW SO MANY MERCHANTS KEEP DISAPPEARING!
KLAK KLAK KLAK KLAK
SKREECK
SERRE

SEPHIE!
Uh oh
HURRY!
Oh PAD TOLD ME ABOUT THOSE!
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT
SO IT'S TRUE?

MERIDIAN'S BEEN INVADED?
BY CADADOR? UNCLE ILAHN?
BE PATIENT MY DEAR ALL WILL BE EXPLAINED
BUT...
BUT WHY? WHAT DOES IT MEAN? HOW COULD
JUST WATCH AND LEARN
COME ALONG
MINISTER ILAHN?
THIS ANNEXATION OF MERIDIAN WILL IT INTERRUPT THE DELIVERY OF SHIPS?
WHAT ABOUT
HOW WILL THE SHARES BE APPORTIONED?
I NEED THOSE SHIPS TO ROUTE CORE TO TERRA!

SILENCE!
CAPADOR HAS NOT INVADED MERIDIAN!
WE ARE MERELY CREATING A PROTECTORATE ENFORCING THE DISCIPLINE NECESSARY FOR MERIDIAN TO THRIVE IN THE AFTERMATH OF MINISTER TUROS DEATH!
I HAVE ASSERTED CONTROL OF MERIDIAN TO ENSURE ITS FUTURE FOR MY BELOVED NIECE SEPHIE NOW TRAGICALLY ORPHANED
WE WILL BEGIN TAKING STEPS TO MERGE THE TWO ECONOMIES
THE INEFFICIENT ONE OF MERIDIAN WITH OUR GLORIOUSLY SUCCESSFUL OWN!
IT'S THE RIGHT TIME
A BOLD HOICE
HURRAH
WELL DONE
TAKE HARGE
THE RIGHT THING TO DO
LIKE THIS

'What about my friends'
UNGH!
OH YES!
OH NO
NO CHOICE NOW

MOVE!

SURROUND THIS BUILDING!
THERE ARE AT LEAST TWO OF THEM INSIDE!
WHUMF
KRRAAAK

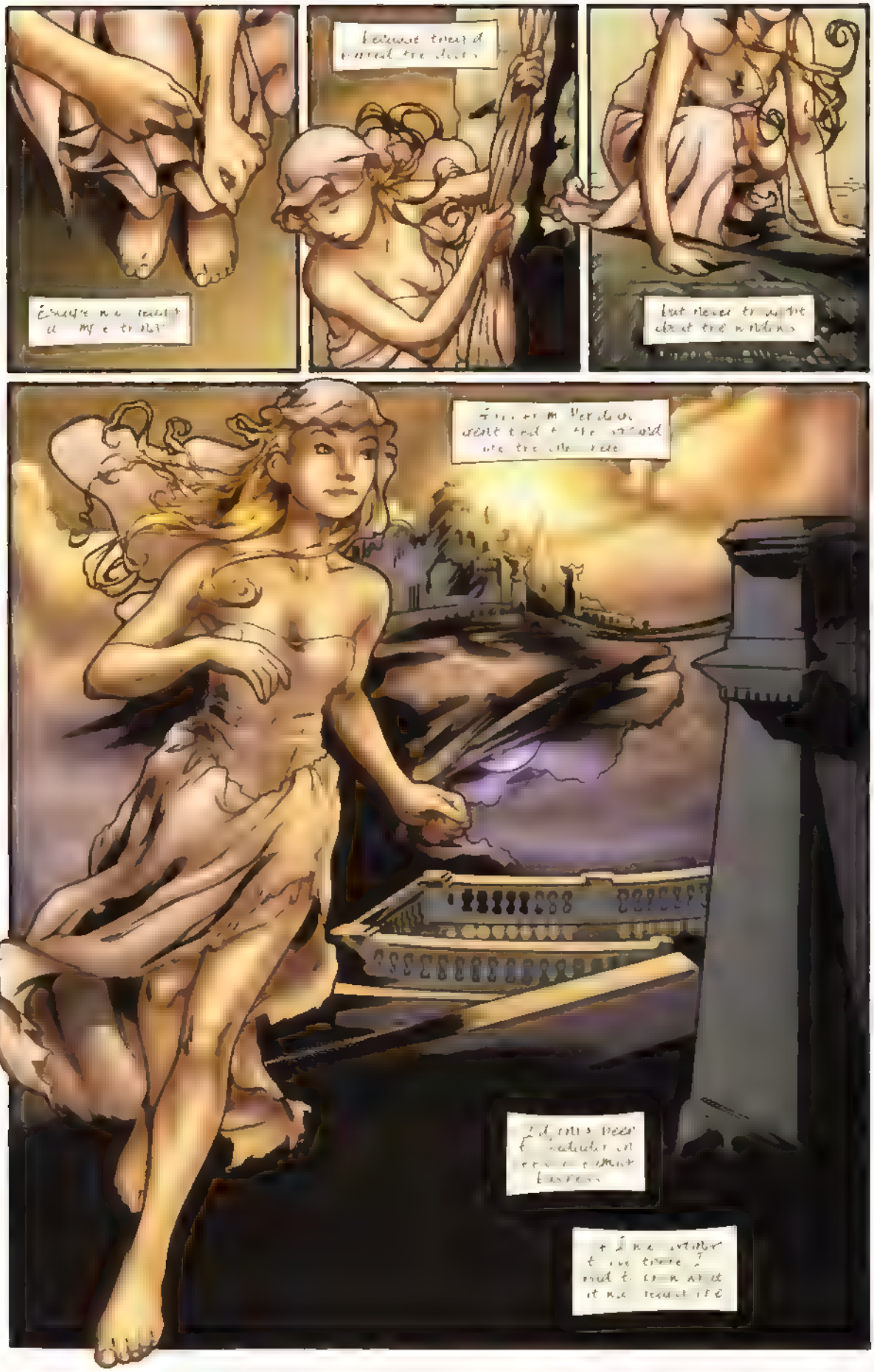
IT'S NOT LIKE THERE'S ANY SHADOWS TO HIDE IN!
JOY GUARANTEE MORTIAN AS PROSPEROUS AND SUCCESSFUL A FUTURE AS CAPADOR!
STRONG SPEECH FROM THE MOUTH OF A MAN WHO WOULD PLANT THE KISS OF DEATH ON HIS OWN BROTHERS LIPS!
WHO ARE YOU REALLY?
I AM THE ONE WHO SEES WHAT IS TO COME!
TWO SIDES IN OPPOSITION NEVER TO TOUCH
I SEE YOUR SOUL EVEN THOUGH YOU HIDE ITS OUTER ASPECT
YOU SEE ?
BOSCAU!
HAVE THAT WOMAN BROUGHT TO MY STUDY
FAREWELL MY FRIENDS! OUR PLAN IS IN MOTION AND I'M OFF TO HOME!

BUT WHY?
BUT
BUT

NO.
AAAH!
WHAM!
FINE!
YOU ARE DISMISSED

OTHER
NOK NOK
ENTER!
HEARTSTEALER
SILENCE!
PLEASE
LEAVE!
WHO ARE YOU

AND HOW DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS?
I SEE BECAUSE I AM THE MUSE OF SATAN THE EYES SHOW ME I AM THE EYES
DO NOT PLAGUE ME WITH RIDDLES!
TELL ME THE SECRET TO THIS POWER
OR FEEL IT DESTROY YOU!
YOUNG MAN I AM OLDER THAN TIME AND WILL OUTLIVE YOUR MEMORY AND YOU WILL NOT FRIGHTEN ME WITH SHOWS OF POWER
WHAT YOU WIELD IS SO GREAT BUT YOU ARE SO SMALL
YOU MUST EXPAND YOUR IMAGINATION
TEACH ME
YOU WILL TEACH ME EVERYTHING



ANSWER ME THIS MUSE
I'LL KEEP AT THIS ALL NIGHT IF I MUST UNTIL I GET A CLEAR ANSWER OUT OF YOU!
SEPHIE
AN SHE DO THIS TOO?
UNH! OF COURSE NOT!
THE EYES SEE TWO WAYS SHARE NO LOOKS NO LIKES NO DIRECTION
WHY WOULD YOU THINK YOU WOULD SHARE THE SAME POWER?
but I was a child

The CrossGen Universe created by Mark Alessi & Gina M. Villa
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Far away...

on the world of Demetria, explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these floating islands, moving goods between them via floating ships built from trees that absorbed the same buoyant element that keeps the islands aloft.

One of these city-states is **Meridian**, island of shipbuilders, and home of **Sephie**, the 16-year-old daughter of **Minister Turos**. Sephie's life has been spent being groomed to someday take over the ruling of Meridian.

One day, Sephie's **Uncle Ilahn**, Minister of Cadador, arrives at Meridian with five ships. Ilahn and Turos meet privately. The brothers are engulfed by light from a strange bird and left with mysterious marks. The shock is too much for Turos, who suffers a fatal heart attack. Sephie finds that his sigil has transferred to her.

After Ilahn discovers that the mark endows him with power, he secretly orders an attack on Sephie, arriving in time to "save" her. Sephie has already saved herself with her own new power, which Ilahn fails to see as he kills her attacker, who is revealed to be one of the house staff. Ilahn tells Sephie she can trust no one as he whisks her away to Cadador. Using his power, he sets a fire to cover their disappearance.

Sephie's friends escape the fire, wondering sadly where she has gone as Ilahn tells the soldiers: "Wait until morning. Do it then..!" The soldiers invade Meridian, and the High Council members, including Turos' house staff and Sephie's friend **Jad**, go to ground. Meanwhile, Sephie spends her first day on Cadador learning the finer points of business from her uncle, who becomes distracted from his lessons when the mysterious **Muse of Giatan** appears. Sephie spends her first evening learning the truth about her uncle from the people he rules, while Ilahn spends it getting enigmatic information about the sigils from the Muse.

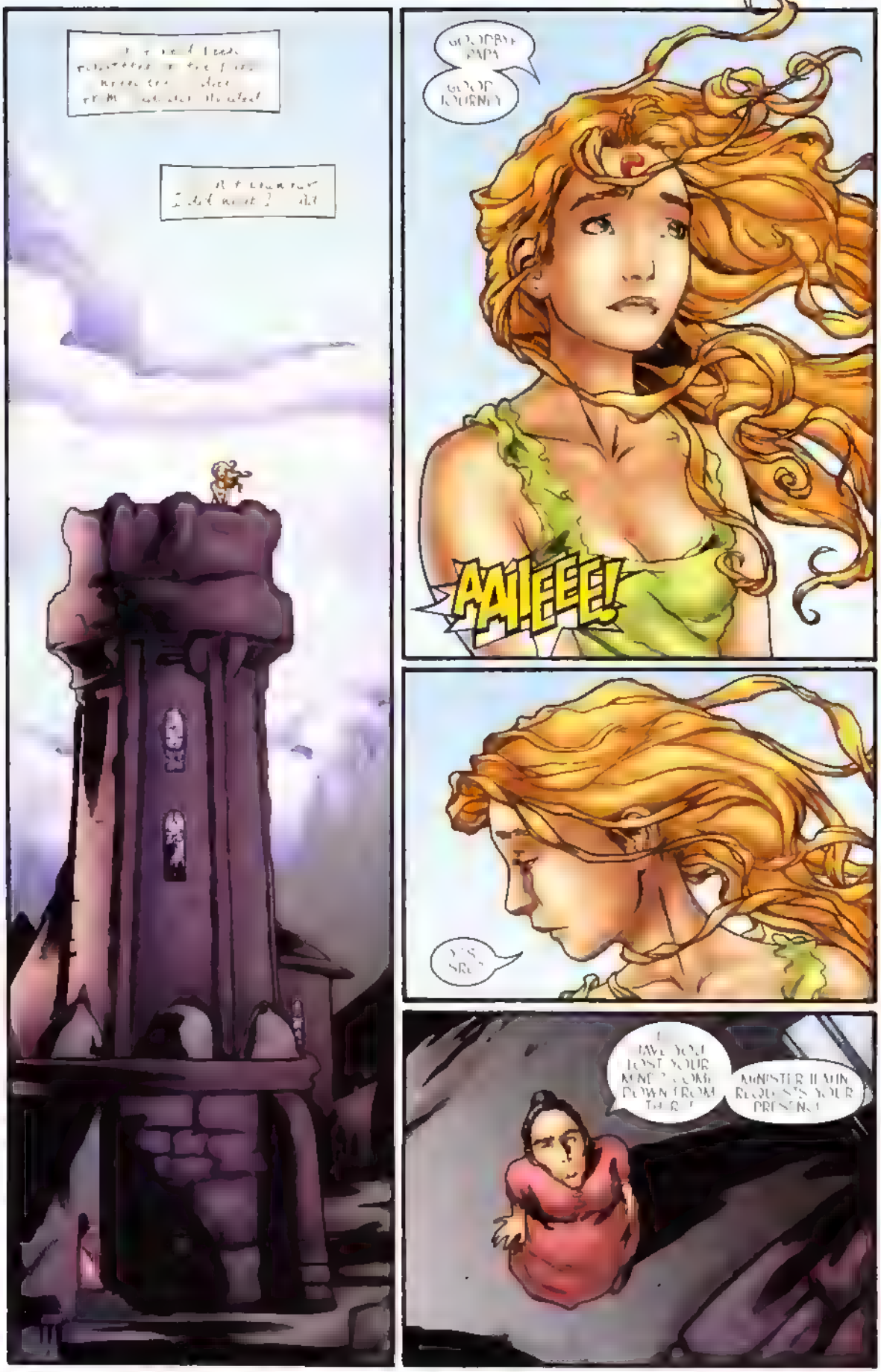
But Sephie keeps one thing secret: although Ilahn has demonstrated his enervation power to Sephie, he doesn't know about hers of renewal...

Meridian™ ... Meridian™, CrossGen™ and the CrossGen sigil™ ...

I HAVE NO WORDS FOR SUCH THIS ISN'T A PROPER FAREWELL

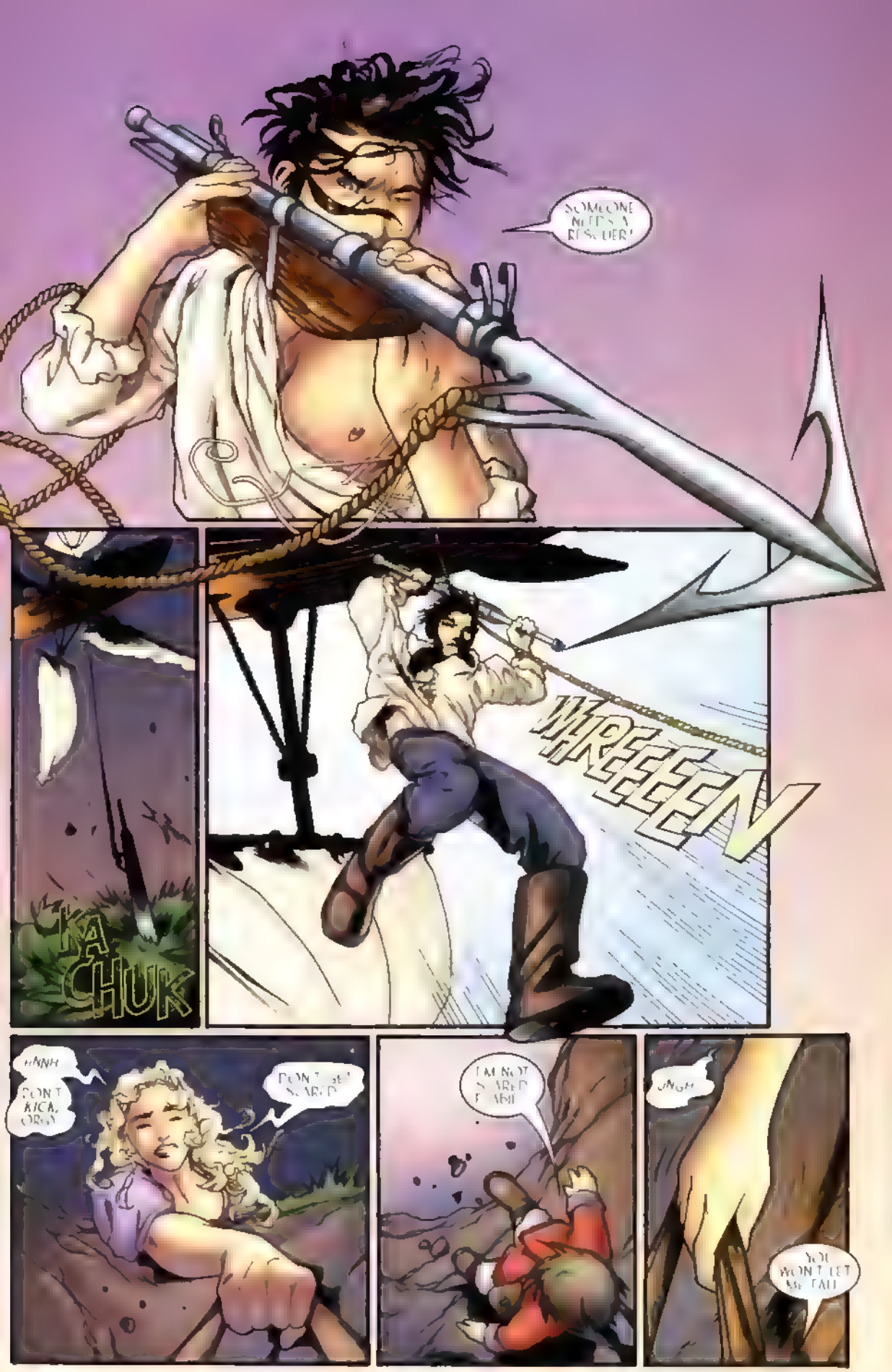
AS THE BODY MEETS THE WIND

SO DOES THE SOUL TAKE FLIGHT


GOODBYE PAPA
GOOD JOURNEY
AAIEEE!
YES, SIR?
I HAVE YOU LOST YOUR MIND? COME DOWN FROM THERE!
MONSTER ILLAN REQUESTS YOUR PRESENCE!

RIGHT AWAY!
KER-RAVAK

WAHAAHG!
JORGY!
UNGH!
KEEP VERY STILL JORGY
WE WON'T LET YOU GO!


SOMEONE NEEDS A RESCUER!
KA CHUK
WHREEEEN
HNNH
DON'T KICK, ORGY
I'M NOT SCARED FLABIL
UNGH
YOU WON'T LET ME FALL

NO WE WON'T ORG!
JAD!
THERE!
THANK THE STARS YOU WERE HERE
SO JORGY DIDN'T HAVE TO BECOME ONE OF THEM!
YES
MIRA!
WHERE
STILL UP TOP
THEN WE'LL ALL HAVE FUN!

RESCUE
NOTHING'S WRONG
SEPHIE SAW
IS SHE?
WE DON'T KNOW
WE THINK SHE MAY HAVE GONE WITH
NO!
DON'T YOU TELL ME WHAT TO DO! YOU'RE NOT MY MOTHER!
JAD!

WHAT IS IT, JORGY?
ARE THE SOLDIERS GOING TO GET US LIKE THEY GOT SEPHIE?
OH, DON'T YOU WORRY SWEETIE.
THEY WON'T FIND US HERE!
THE GROWNUPS HAVE TO CALM UP AND SET TRAPS.
AND THEN WE'LL ALL RIDE ON A SLED!
LET'S PLAY A GAME.
WE'LL LOOK FOR SEPHIE ON OUR WAY!
BUT I CAN'T PLAY! I DON'T REMEMBER WHAT SHE LOOKS AT!
YOU'LL ALWAYS BE ABLE TO RECOGNIZE SEPHIE BECAUSE SHE HAS A MARK ON HER HEAD RIGHT HERE!
DO YOU KNOW THE STORY? THEY ARE MYSTERIOUS.

MORE MYSTERIES!
DAMN YOU MUSE!
WE'VE BEEN AT THIS FOR TOO MANY HOURS NOW!
YOU GIVE ME OBSCURITIES AND HINTS WHEN I'M ASKING FOR INFORMATION!
THE EYES OF THE MUSE OF [illegible] MANY THINGS. THE YES OF THE MINISTER OF [illegible] ARE [illegible] WITH NEED.
YES I NEED!
I NEED TO KNOW IF THIS ABILITY IS A GIFT FROM MY OWN NATURE
OR IF THE POWER I NOW POSSESS IS PERPETRATED IN MY MIND!
ONCE AGAIN?
THEY SAID.
COVER YOURSELF!
YOU SEE THE ANSWER BUT YOU DO NOT KNOW IT

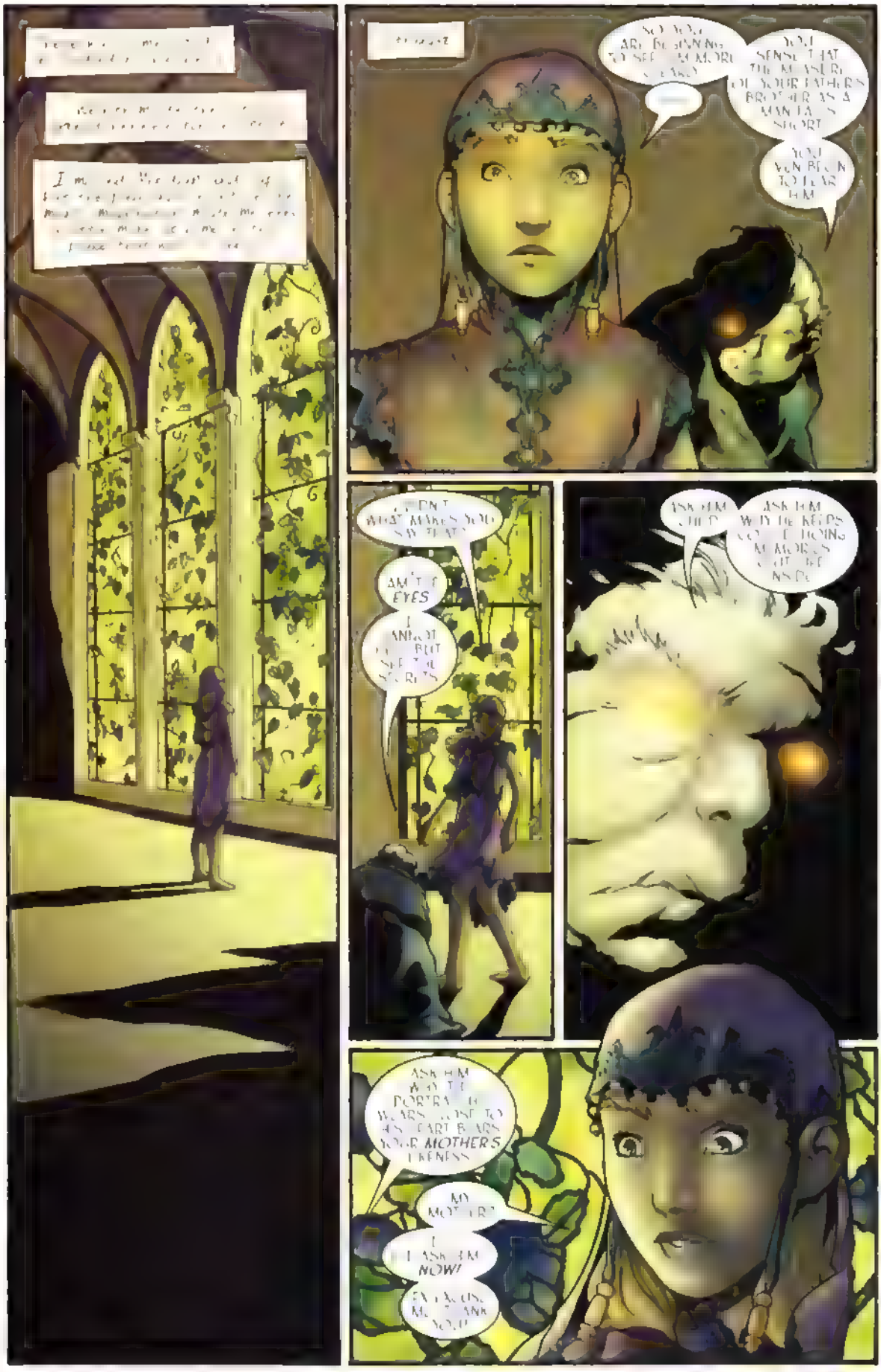
HE SENT No 716 REPRESENTATIVE FROM TORBEL SOLICITOR TRUPERT
SO RUDY SENT HIS BLOODY AND DIDN'T COME HIMSELF
WAIT! CLOSED SUPPLY MINISTER RUDY MISTAKENLY BELIEVES HIMSELF TO HAVE THE UPPER HAND
THIS HAS LED HIM TO ADOPT A DANGEROUSLY CASUAL APPROACH TO OUR NEGOTIATIONS
MINISTER LAGNE MINISTER RUDY SENDS GREETINGS FROM TORBEL
IT'S OKAY I'M TO RENEW YOUR PRESENT AGREEMENT
SINCE WE DIDN'T RECEIVE A COURIER FROM CHEADOR AND OUR SUPPLY IS RUNNING SHORT HE SENT ME TO LOOK IN THE KEA
THERE'S A SMALL PROBLEM SIR ARNIC
TORBEL HAS CHEATED CHEADOR
YOU HAVE DELIVERED MORE VATS THAT I KNOW TO BLUNDERBOR TO CHOOSE OF YOUR NEWEST PRODUCTION RUN
CHEATED?
THERE'S NO CHEAT INVOLVED
YOU CONTRACTED YOU AND YOU WERE MADE AWARE THAT OUR MASTER BOMADORA'S PAST DESIRE NOW MORE THAN EVER AND MORE RESPONSIVE OR WE'LL
YOU DIDN'T WANT TO PAY MORE SO WE SLIPPED VATS OF THE CONTRACTED STYLE AT THE CONTRACTED PRICE

FINEST AVAILABLE
THAT'S SALES PUFFERY LAHN!
AMN YOU MAN
MASSIVE
FALL!
MINISTER

NOW
THAT PEOPLE SHOULD ALWAYS MAKE SURE THEY KEEP TO THE LETTER OF AN AGREEMENT NOT JUST ITS INTENT
PERCEPTION OF INTENT
BUT I HEARD
A LOT OF PEOPLE IN CAPADOR DON'T FAVOR A HOSTILE RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER CITIES
WHERE
AROUND
WOULD YOU REALLY LET TORBEL FALL?
ONLY IF NECESSARY

SOMETIMES ENFORCEMENT OF NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES IS NECESSARY FOR THE FUTURE OF A BUSINESS RELATIONSHIP
KEEP MOVING
AFTER THREE MORE TURNS OF THE TRAIL THERE'S A HUT TO BE FOUND NOT IN
MERCY'S GIRLS WILL CLIMB YOU DOWN TO THE CENTER ROAD TO BEACON NOT IN AND THE OTHERS
WE'RE NEARLY THE LAST THE MINISTER'S STAFF AND THE OUNCIL ARE ON THEIR WAY
WHAT ABOUT YOU JON?
I'LL BE ALONG SOON
THOSE CADALORIAN SOLDIERS DON'T KNOW THE HILLS OF MERIDIAN AND LIVE GOT THEM OUT NUMBERED
THERE'S ONLY THREE OF THEM

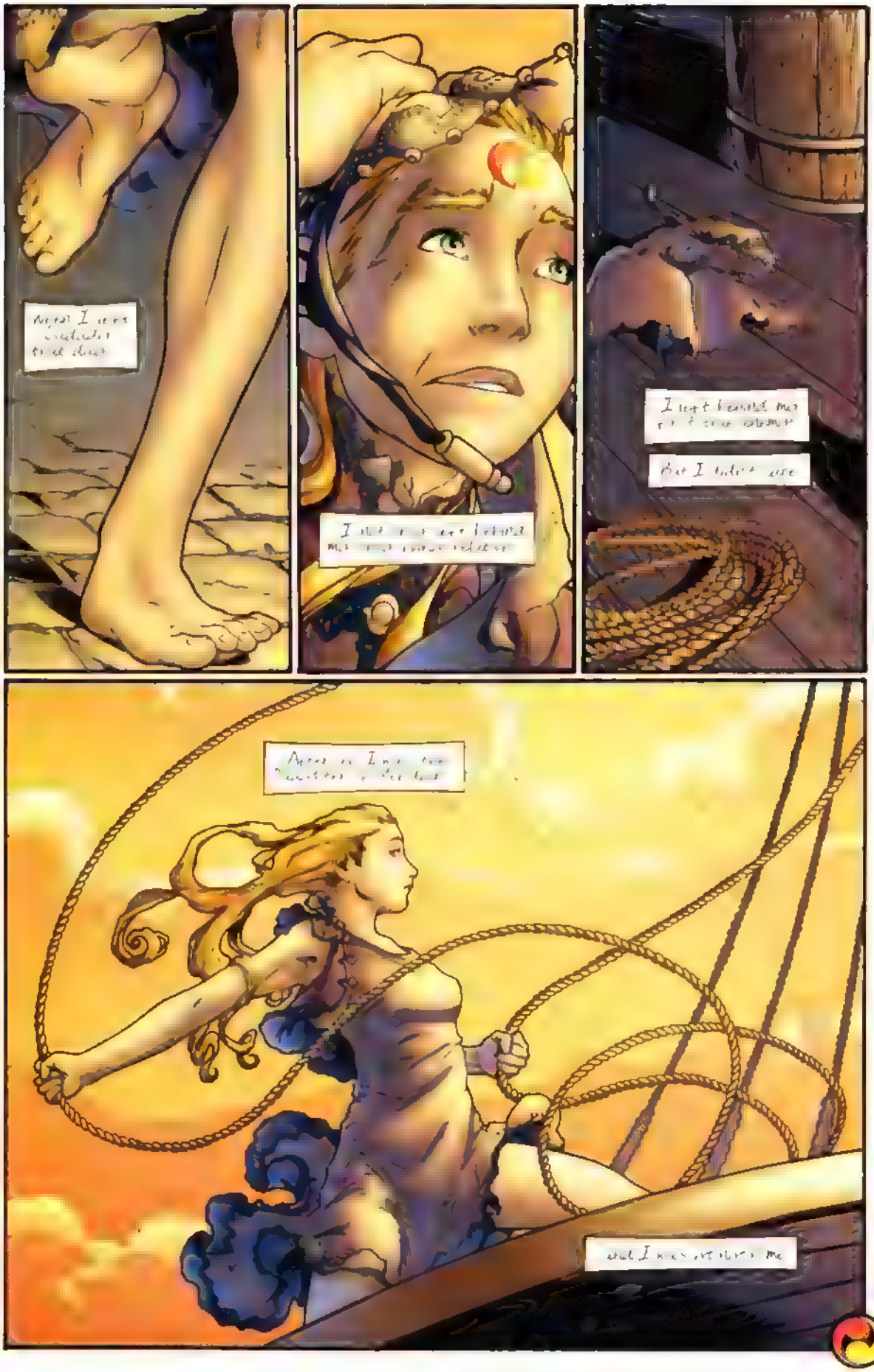
FOUR
TAKE HIM IN



NOTICE
YES LORD MINISTER
DO YOU WEAR A PORTRAIT OF MY MOTHER?
TRUE?

HOW DARE YOU BLURT OUT SUCH A THING!
SOPHIE WHERE DID YOU GET THIS STORY?
THAT TITLE WOMAN!
SHE TOLD ME!
SHE SAID SHE SAW IT!
IS THIS TRUE, ISN'T IT?
WHAT DOES IT MEAN?
WHAT WAS MY MOTHER TO YOU?
SHE WAS EVERYTHING!
SHE WAS ONLY ONE MORE THING THAT YOU STOLE FROM ME!
SHE SHOULD HAVE BEEN MINE!
MERIDIAN SHOULD HAVE BEEN MINE!
YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN
NOOO!
WHAK
STOP IT!
I HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU!

BOTH
POWER
DON'T WE?
NO!
NOTHING
NEVER
HOME!



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MERIDIAN
Joshua Middleto
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Far away...

on the world of Demetria explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them

One of these islands is **Meridian,** home of shipbuilders and **Sephie,** the 16-year-old daughter of **Minister Turos.** Sephie's life has been spent being groomed to someday take over the ruling of Meridian.

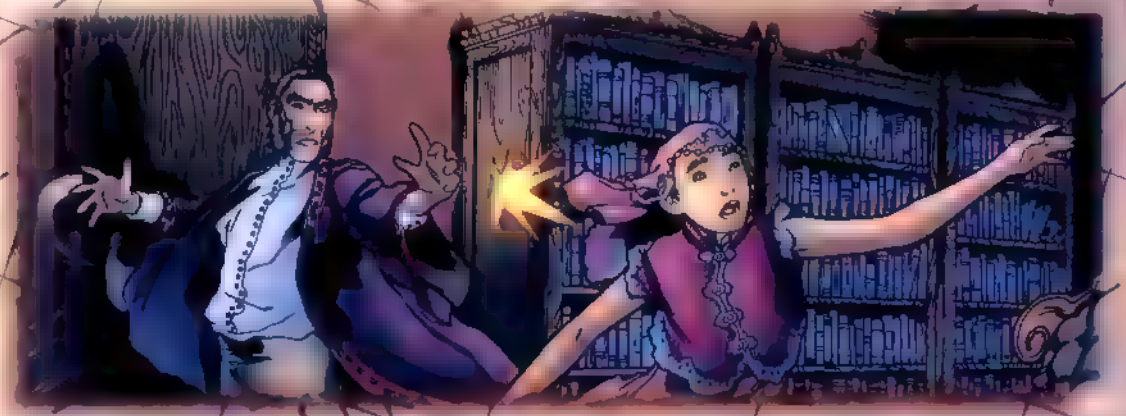
One day, Sephie's **Uncle Ilahn,** Minister of the neighboring island of Cadador, arrives at Meridian to meet with Turos The brothers are engulfed by light and left with mysterious sigils The shock is too much for Turos, who suffers a fatal heart attack. Sephie finds that his sigil has transferred to her

After Ilahn discovers that the sigil endows him with power, he secretly orders an attack on Sephie, arriving in time to "save" her Ilahn tells Sephie she can trust no one as he whisks her away to Cadador

The next morning, soldiers invade Meridian and Sephie's friends prepare to leave Meanwhile, Sephie spends her first day on **Cadador** learning the finer points of business from her uncle. The mysterious **Muse of Giatan** appears, offering enigmatic information about the sigils and about a certain portrait Ilahn wears.. which holds an image of Sephie's mother.

Sephie, disturbed by what she learns about Ilahn, is provoked into a confrontation. She storms away from his estate and sets sail for Meridian.

But Ilahn won't give her up so easily, and Cadadorian soldiers follow Sephie..



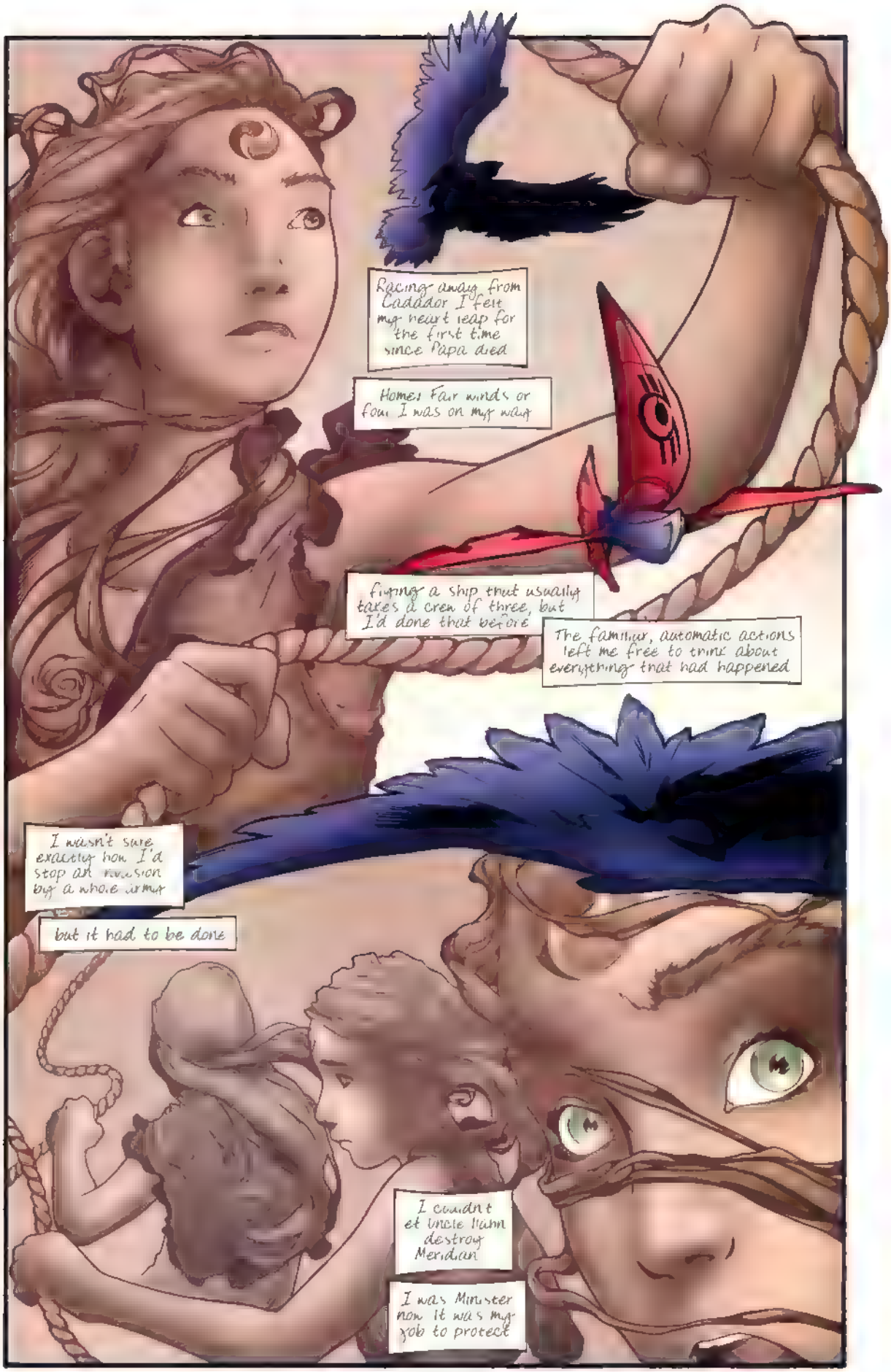
Meridian [illegible] Meridian [illegible] and the Crosstien sig[illegible]

I was anxious to see Meridian again
When they said that Cadador had invaded Meridian, my mind jumped right to horror stories of war from Pre-Cataclysm days, and I pictured something bloody and awful
I forgot that an army, like a business comes down to just PEOPLE
and the people of Meridian are strong
CONGRATULATIONS JON TAKARTY!
YOU'RE THE FIRST OF MERIDIAN'S COUNCILORS TO BE DETAINED
KLANG
YOU RUSTICS ARE HARD TO FIND, BUT THE OTHERS CAN'T HIDE FOR LONG
WE'LL BRING THEM IN SOON
YOU MAY HAVE TAKEN THE LAND OF MERIDIAN BUT DON'T THINK YOU'LL TAKE HER PEOPLE SO EASILY
WE'LL SEE OLD MAN

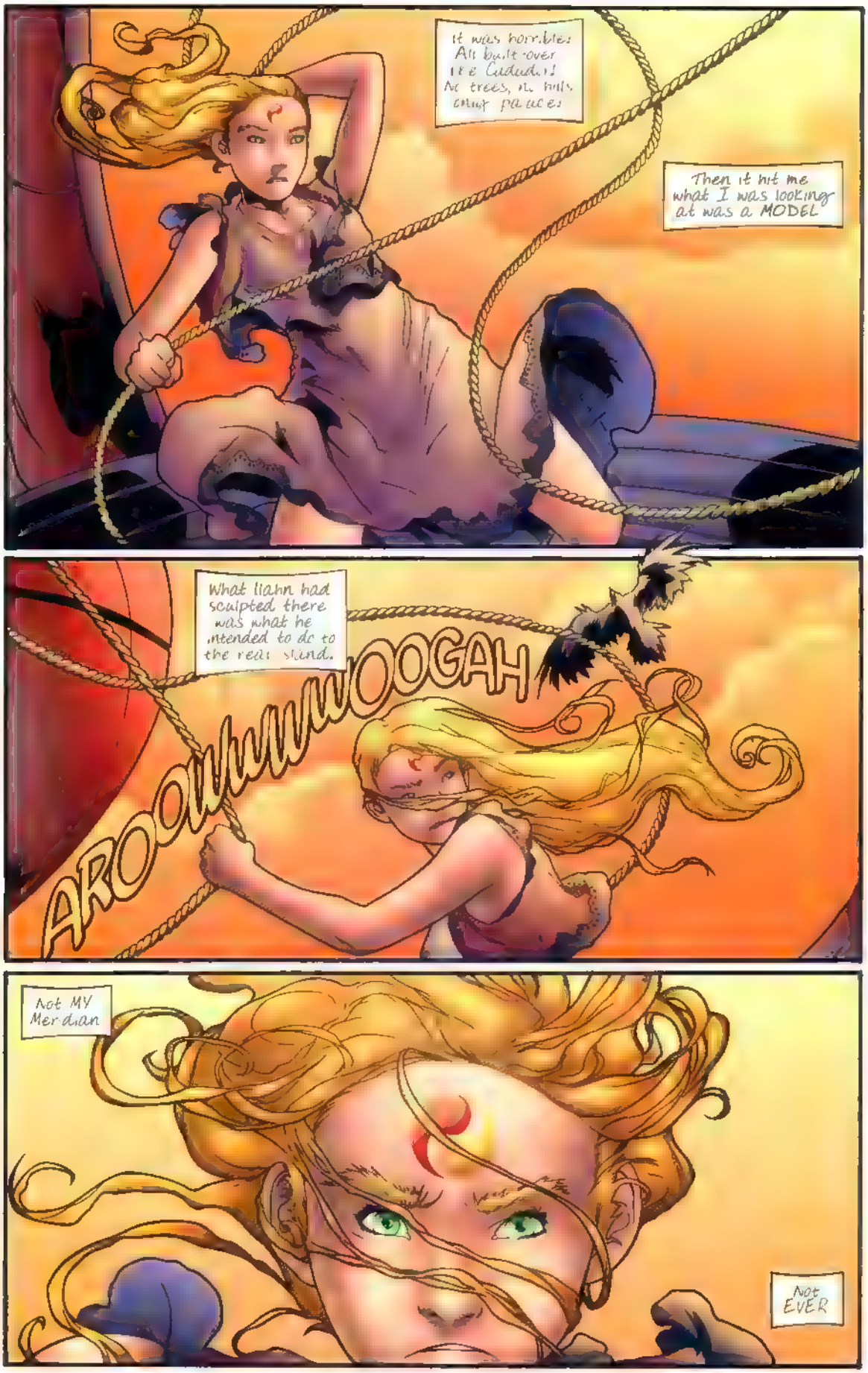
HIC-
ARE THEY GONE ON?
YES
DO I KNOW YOU?
AH-CHOO!
DRATTED HORSEHAIR
ALWAYS MAKES ME SNEEZE
ARN!
C'MON JON...LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!
I DIDN'T HAVE A CLUE!
THAT WAS THE IDEA JON
YOU'RE A FINE LEADER BUT A LOUSY ACTOR
HOW'D YOU KNOW THEY'D BRING ME HERE?
WE DIDN'T
STILL'S DOWN AT THE DOCKS AND MERILY'S GIRLS ARE KEEPING WATCH IN THE HILL TOWER
THAT'S HOW WE KNEW YOU'D BEEN GRABBED
GOTTA LEARN TO COUNT, SAILOR!

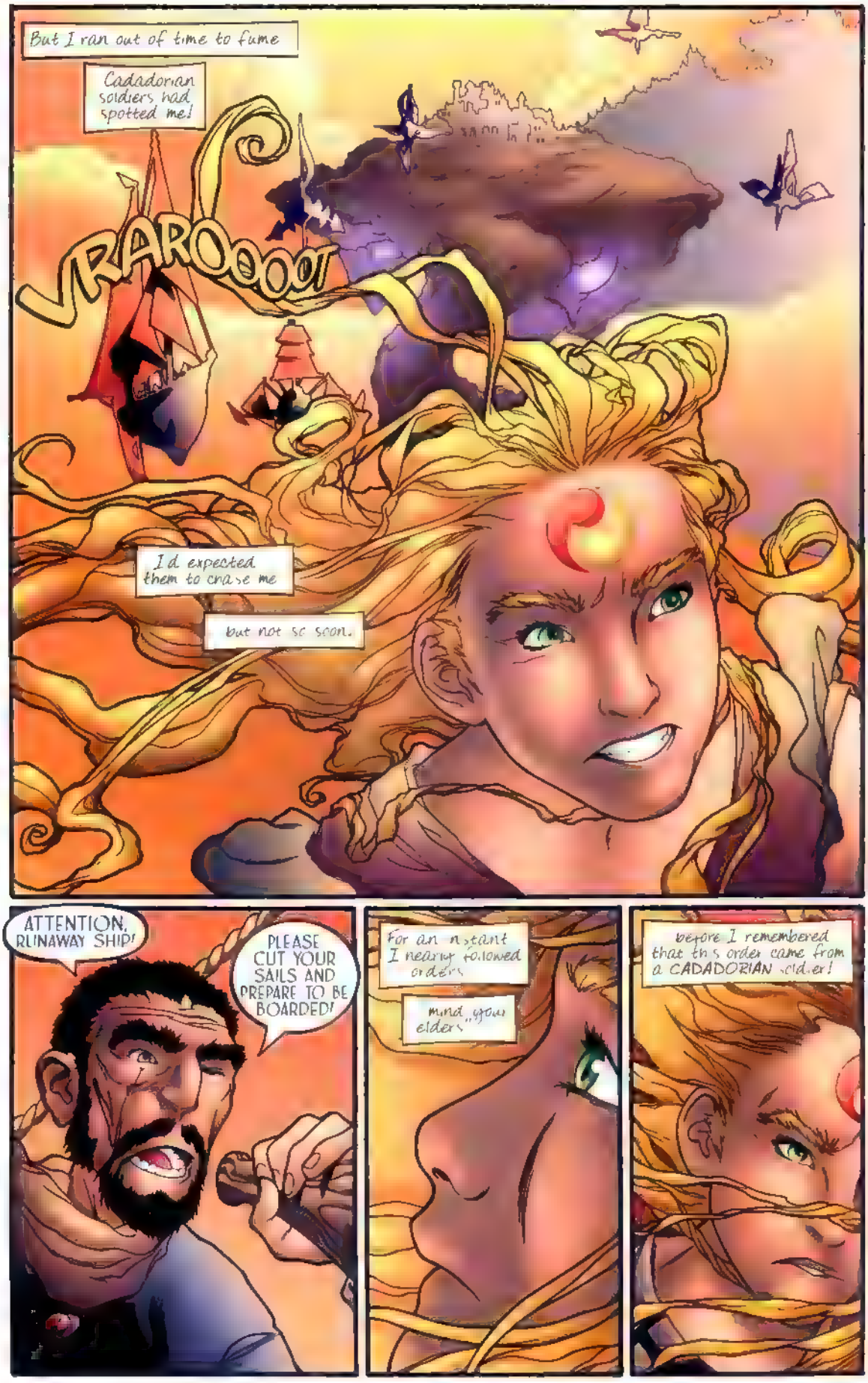
NOW!
SURE?
FPLF
WHEEEET
WHAT'S GOING ON IN THERE?
HAH CHUCK!

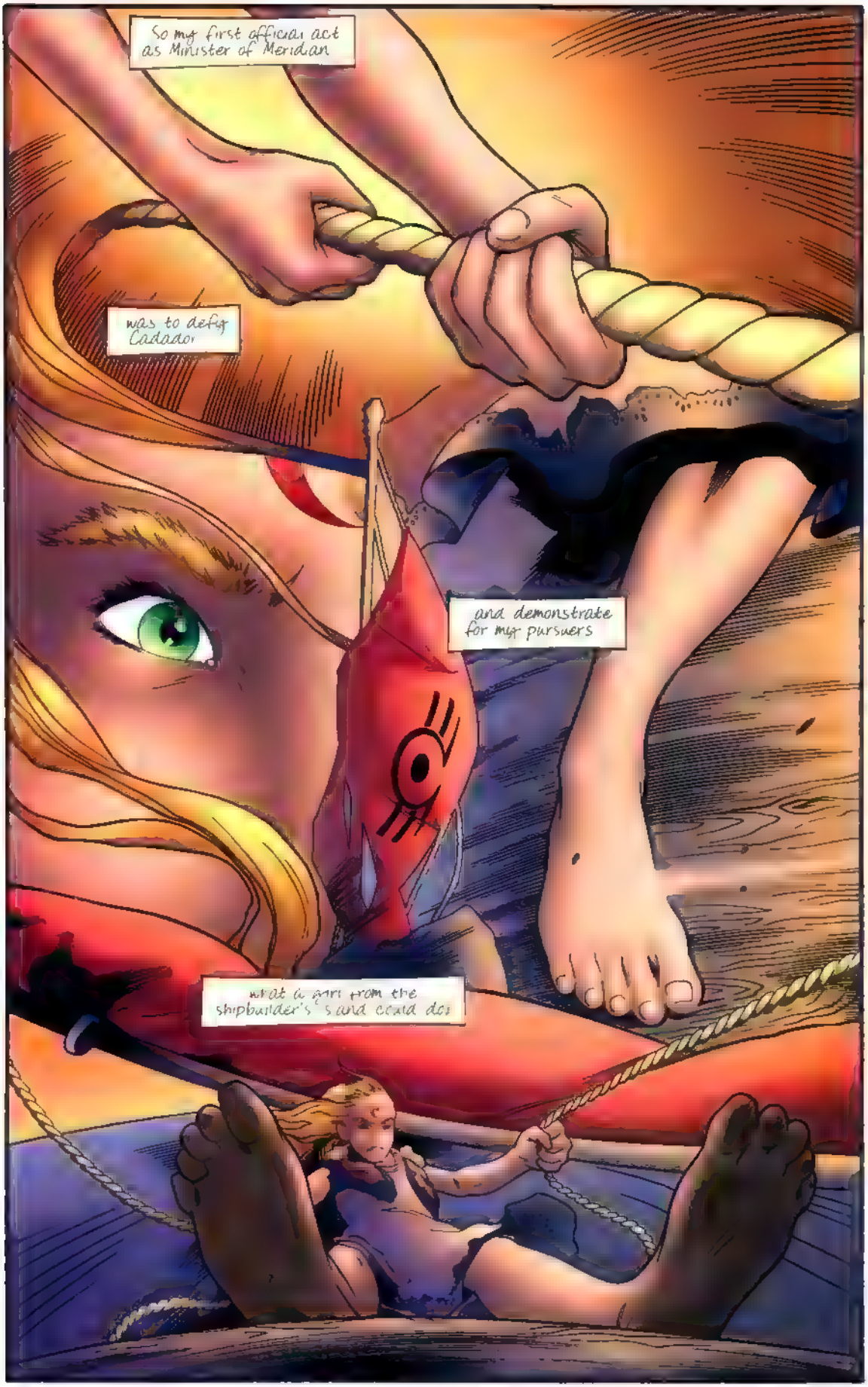
KWHACK
WHAT HAPPENED TO THE PARTY I WAS LEADING UP THE HILLS?
ALREADY DOWN THE CENTER ROAD. THEY'RE HALFWAY TO BEACON NOTCH BY NOW. ONE MORE STOP AND WE'RE NEXT.
THAT'S COMFORTING.
I QUESTIONED TUROS' WISDOM WHEN HE DECIDED TO EXPAND THE MAZE, BUT IT'S CERTAINLY A BOON TO US NOW.
THERE'S AN ACCESS NEARBY?
UNDER YOUR NOSE.
AH, I'VE SPENT THE LAST DECADE MAPPING AND EXPANDING THE TUNNELS WHILE *SOME* PEOPLE FLITTED AROUND ON BOATS.
KREEEEEEK
PROBABLY THE ONLY PERSON WHO KNOWS THESE PASSAGES AS WELL AS I DO IS *SEPHIE*.
THAT GIRL'S BEEN CURIOUS AS A CAT SINCE SHE COULD WALK.
I HOPE SHE'S WELL.

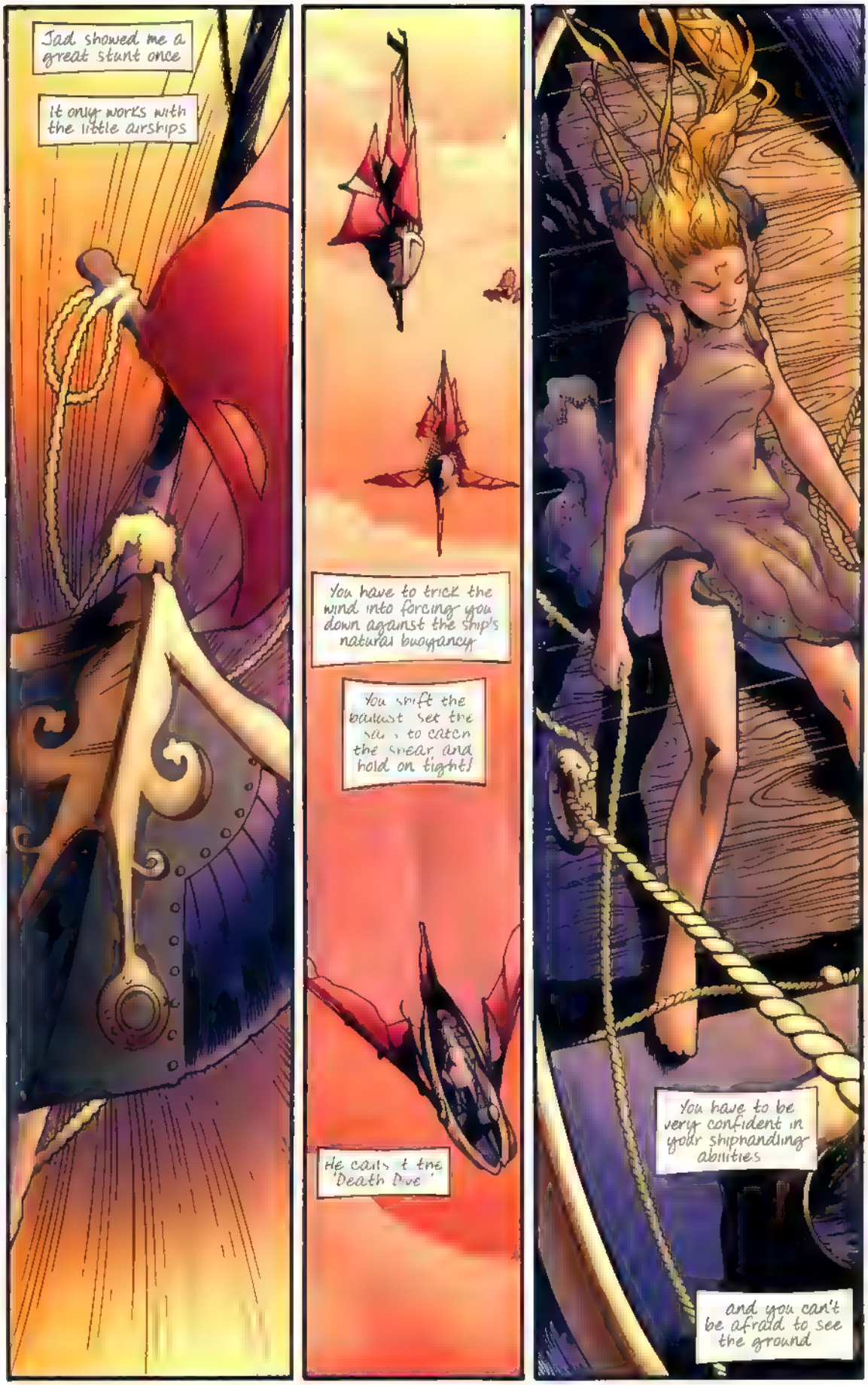

Racing away from Caddaor I felt my heart leap for the first time since Papa died
Home! Fair winds or foul I was on my way
Flying a ship that usually takes a crew of three, but I'd done that before
The familiar, automatic actions left me free to think about everything that had happened
I wasn't sure exactly how I'd stop an invasion by a whole army
but it had to be done
I couldn't let Uncle Hann destroy Meridan
I was Minister now it was my job to protect

...MERIDIAN?
Uncle Hahn's estate
all my visits, and I'd never SEEN it
I'd heard whispers of fascism construction
but no one ever told me he'd carved his little island into a copy of Meridian!
Maybe that's why Papa always berthed our ship on the other side?


It was horrible! All built over the Cadwallon! No trees, no hills, only palaces
Then it hit me what I was looking at was a MODEL
What Iiahn had sculpted there was what he intended to do to the real stand.
AROOWWWWOOGAH
Not MY Meridian
Not EVER


But I ran out of time to fume
Cadadorian soldiers had spotted me!
VRAROOOOT
I'd expected them to chase me
but not so soon.
ATTENTION, RUNAWAY SHIP!
PLEASE CUT YOUR SAILS AND PREPARE TO BE BOARDED!
For an instant I nearly followed orders
"mind your elders"
before I remembered that this order came from a CADADORIAN soldier!


So my first official act as Minister of Meridan
was to defy Cadador
and demonstrate for my pursuers
what a girl from the shipbuilder's sound could do


Jad showed me a great stunt once
It only works with the little airships
You have to trick the wind into forcing you down against the ship's natural buoyancy
You shift the ballast set the sails to catch the shear and hold on tight!
He calls it the 'Death Dive'
You have to be very confident in your shiphandling abilities
and you can't be afraid to see the ground

I'M VERY DISAPPOINTED IN THOSE EYES YOU PRIZE SO HIGHLY MUSE
THEY SEEM TO HAVE BEEN *BLIND* TO THIS *BETRAYAL* BY MY NIECE!
ARE YOU A MUSE DEVOID OF INSPIRATION, OR DO YOU TOY WITH ME?
I ASKED YOU IF SEPHIE HAD POWERS LIKE MINE!
AND I ASSURED YOU THAT SHE HAS NOT *YOUR* GIFT
SHE HAS HER OWN
NOW TAKE YOUR THOUGHTS FROM THE TROUBLESOME CHILD
WHAT YOU WISHED HER TO BE IS *ANOTHER'S* ROLE
ONE WHO LOOKS YOUR OPPOSITE BUT IS YOUR LIKE
NOK NOK

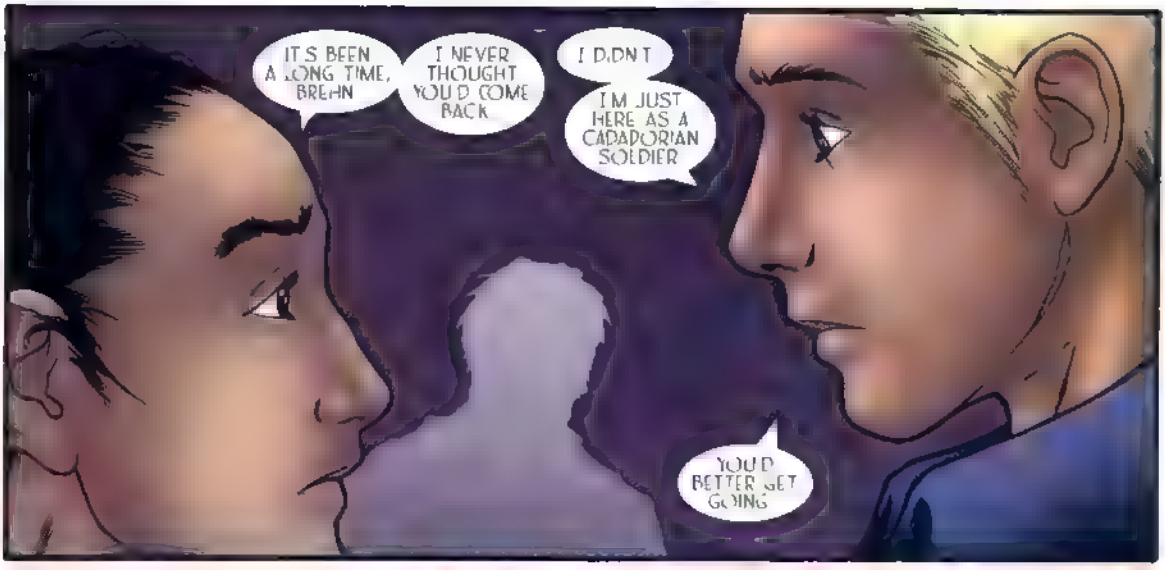
Oh, I'M NOT DONE WITH MY NIECE THAT EASILY
COME IN!
LISTEN ARETELLY MEN
I'VE ORDERED OUR SOLDIERS TO INTERCEPT SEPHIE, BUT THERE EXISTS A CHANCE THAT HER POW HER SKILLS COULD ALLOW HER TO ELUDE THEM
FOLLOWING THE COMPASS POINT TRADE ROUTES, YOU FOUR ARE TO DELIVER THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE TO EACH MINISTER ALONG THE ROUTE
ANY FAILURE TO TRANSMIT MY MESSAGE SWIFTLY OR EXACTLY WILL BE DEALT WITH BY ME PERSONALLY
SHE'S HEADED FOR MERIDIAN OF COURSE BUT WE WANT TO ENSURE THAT NO ISLAND IS MOTIVATED TO AID HER
YOU SEE MUSE? I HAVE THE SITUATION WELL IN HAND
MUSE ?

TEN BALES TIMES A STANDING OFFER OF SEVEN PER
NOTHING BETTER'S OFFERED, SHOULD NET SEVENTY EASY
MAYBE MORE
PURE PROFIT ALL
THIS MAY BE OUR LAST TIME COMING TO CAPADOR THEN
GOOD I'VE LOST PATIENCE WITH THE JOURNEY UP TO THIS PLACE
WE'LL KNOW- UHF!
LET ME THROUGH PLEASE!
HNG!
RUDE GIRL
SO THIS IS CAPADOR
MINE FOR THE TAKING

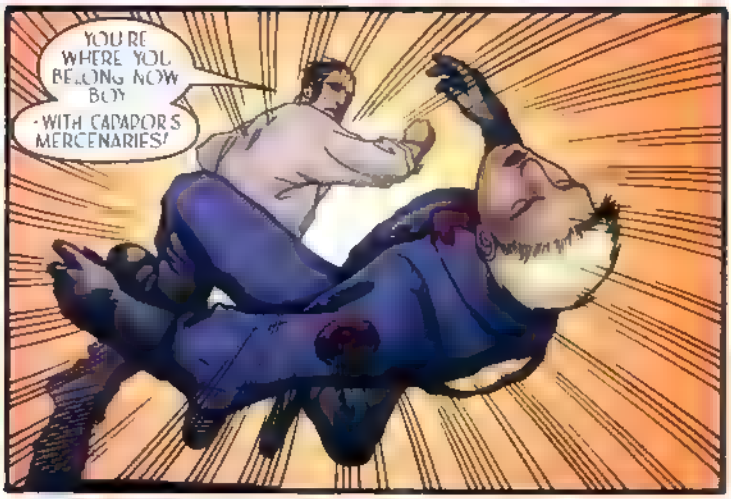
GO BACK!

GO BACK DOWN! IT'S A TRAP!
NO FRISHA
WE WON'T LEAVE YOU! GO!
NO ONE WHO'S AGREED TO GO GETS LEFT BEHIND!
WHOMP
KRAAK
WHUMPF

LEAVE ME!
JUST LEAVE!
NOW!
WHA...?
BUT HE'S ONE OF YOUR OWN!
WHUNK
NO. HE'S NOT
NOW GO
WOULD YOU LISTEN TO ME?
GET OUT OF HERE
NOT NOW ARN
BREHN?
HELLO LISELA


IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME, BREHN
I NEVER THOUGHT YOU'D COME BACK
I DIDN'T
I'M JUST HERE AS A CADADORIAN SOLDIER
YOU'D BETTER GET GOING

BUT SOMEBODY'S GOT TO HIT ME OR I'LL HAVE TOO MUCH TO EXPLAIN
HAPPY TO OBLIGE

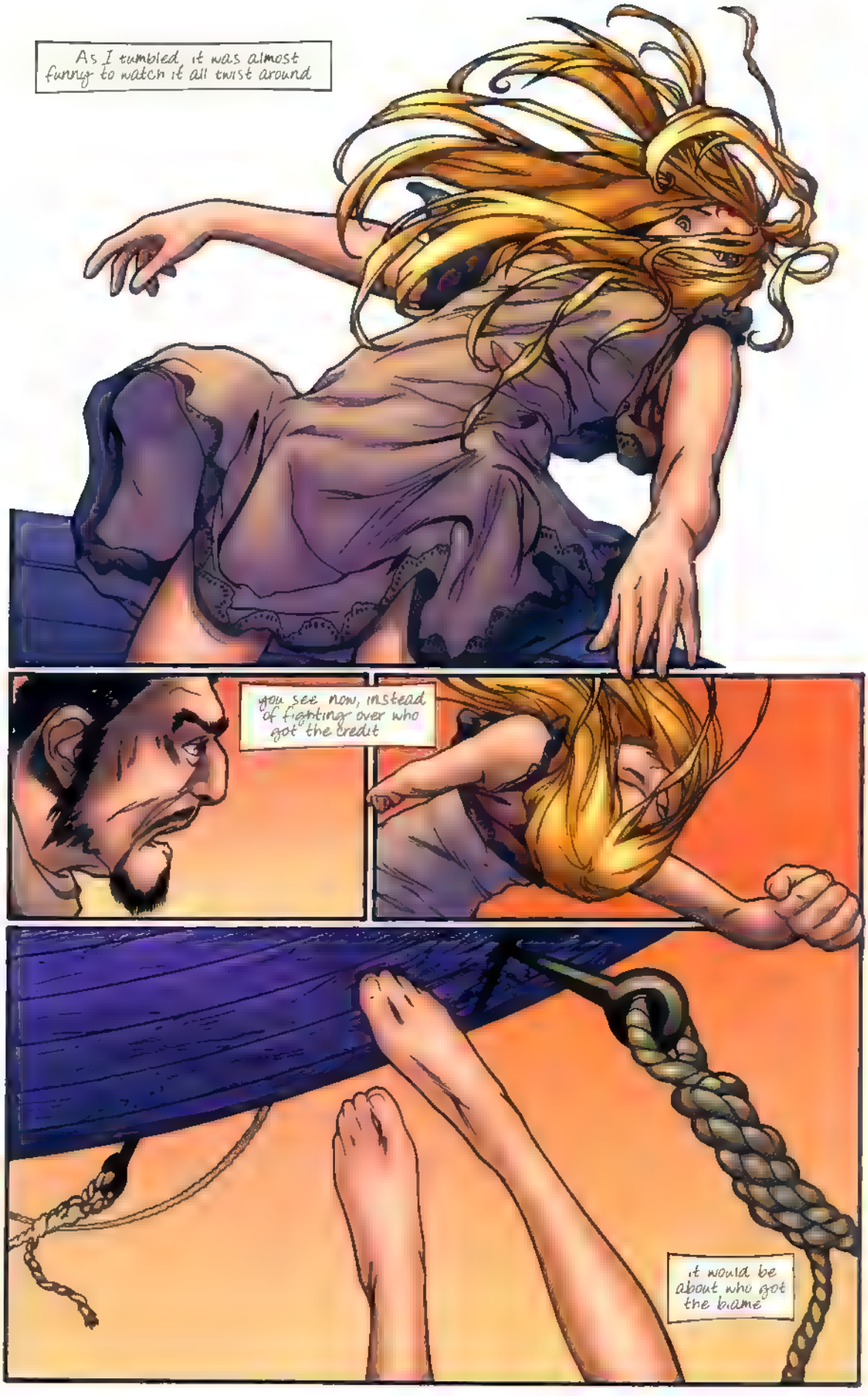

YOU'RE WHERE YOU BELONG NOW BOY
-WITH CADADOR'S MERCENARIES!

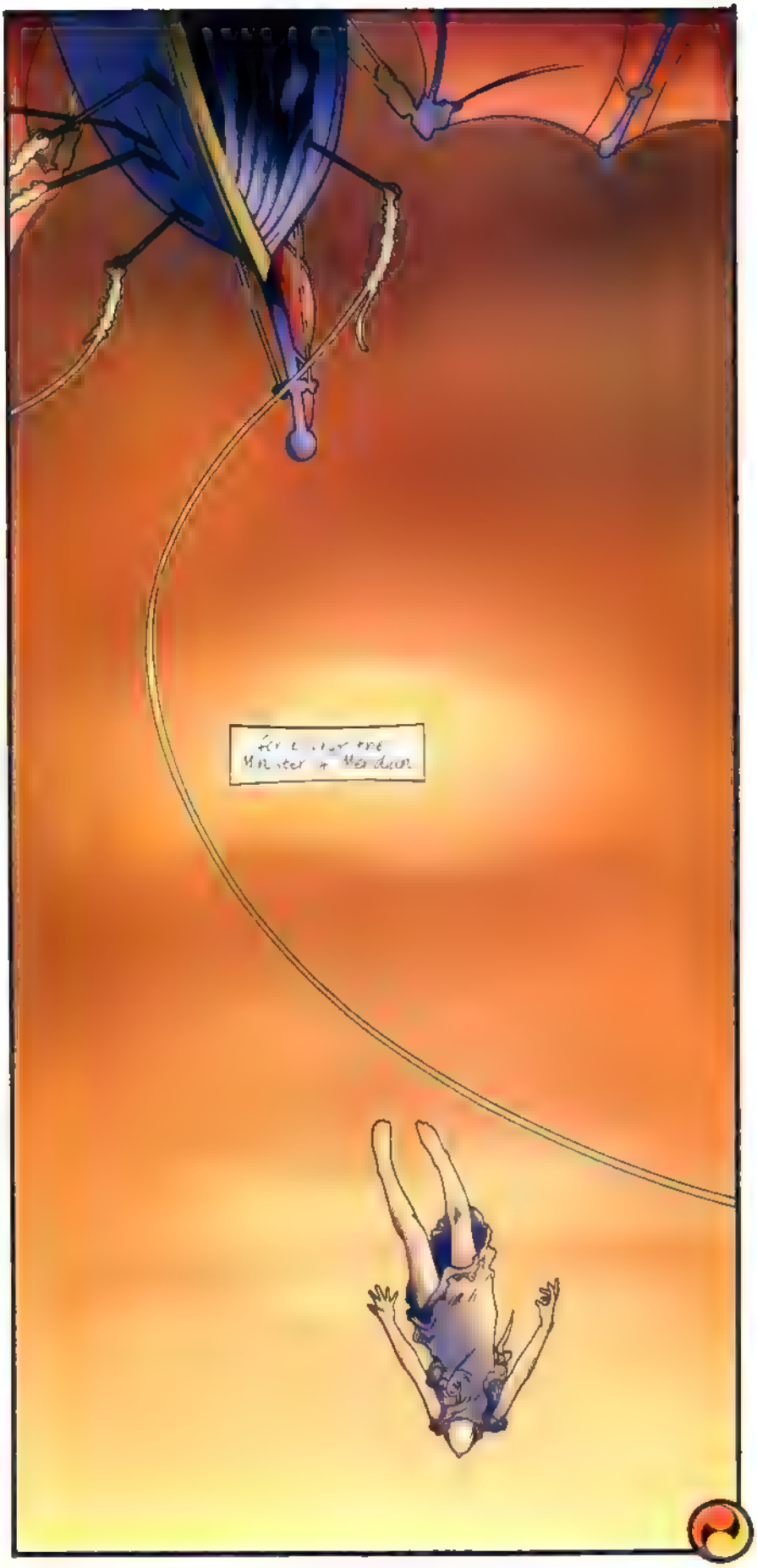
DON'T CRY FOR HIM LISECA
THIS GOOD DEED DOESN'T REDEEM HIS TRANSGRESSIONS

I JUST WISH
WE ALL WISH TIME COULD BE TURNED BACK LIKE A CLOCK WORKS
BUT IT ONLY MOVES FORWARD AS MUST WE
IS IT TRUE THIS TUNNEL LEADS UNDER EVERY BUILDING?
SON BETTER THAN THAT!
THE TUNNELS LEAD ALL THE WAY DOWN TO BEACON POINT
AND ON TO FREEDOM!

The Caaadorian soldiers were better sailors than I expected
I knew I was about to be caught
LET'S COORDINATE THE SPEARS
WAIT ON MY SIGNAL!
But no one waited
They were all afraid somebody else would get the credit

So too many spears were cast
NO!
THAT CRAFT'S TOO LIGHT!
LET THE LINES GO SLACK!
from too many ships more massive than mine
so my ship stepped still
dead still
but I didn't


As I tumbled, it was almost funny to watch it all twist around
you see now, instead of fighting over who got the credit
it would be about who got the blame



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Head Writer

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Art Director

Pam Davies
Production Manager

Sylvia Bretz
Production Assistant

Dave Lanphear
Design Director

FIRST
"UNEARTHED"

HERE
I'M TRUSTING YOU

RMMMMMM
MM
MM
RMMMR!

GOOD SO FAR
YOU WERE RIGHT

IT WAS STILL THERE
I THOUGHT IT WAS ONLY A LEGEND
YET YOU KNEW WHERE IT WAS
YOU SURPRISE ME ENSON

KEEP DOING IT
UNDERSTAND, PERSHA, THAT THIS WAS AN INDULGENCE I TRUST MY EYES HAVE SHOWN YOU ALL YOU WISHED TO SEE?
AAAA!
HE KNEW I WAS THERE?

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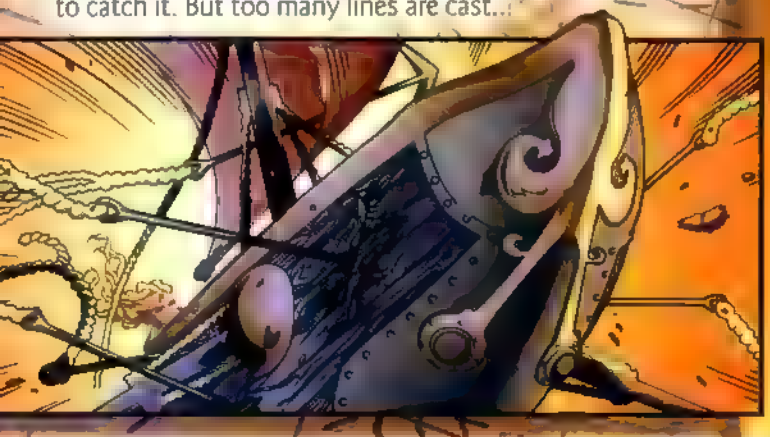
One of these islands is **Meridian,** home of shipbuilders and **Sephie,** the 16 year-old daughter of **Minister Turos**. Sephie's life has been spent being groomed to someday take over the ruling of Meridian.

One day Sephie's **Uncle Ilahn**, Minister of the neighboring island of Cadador, meets with Turos. The brothers are engulfed by light and left with mysterious sigils. Turos suffers a fatal heart attack. Sephie finds that his sigil has transferred to her.

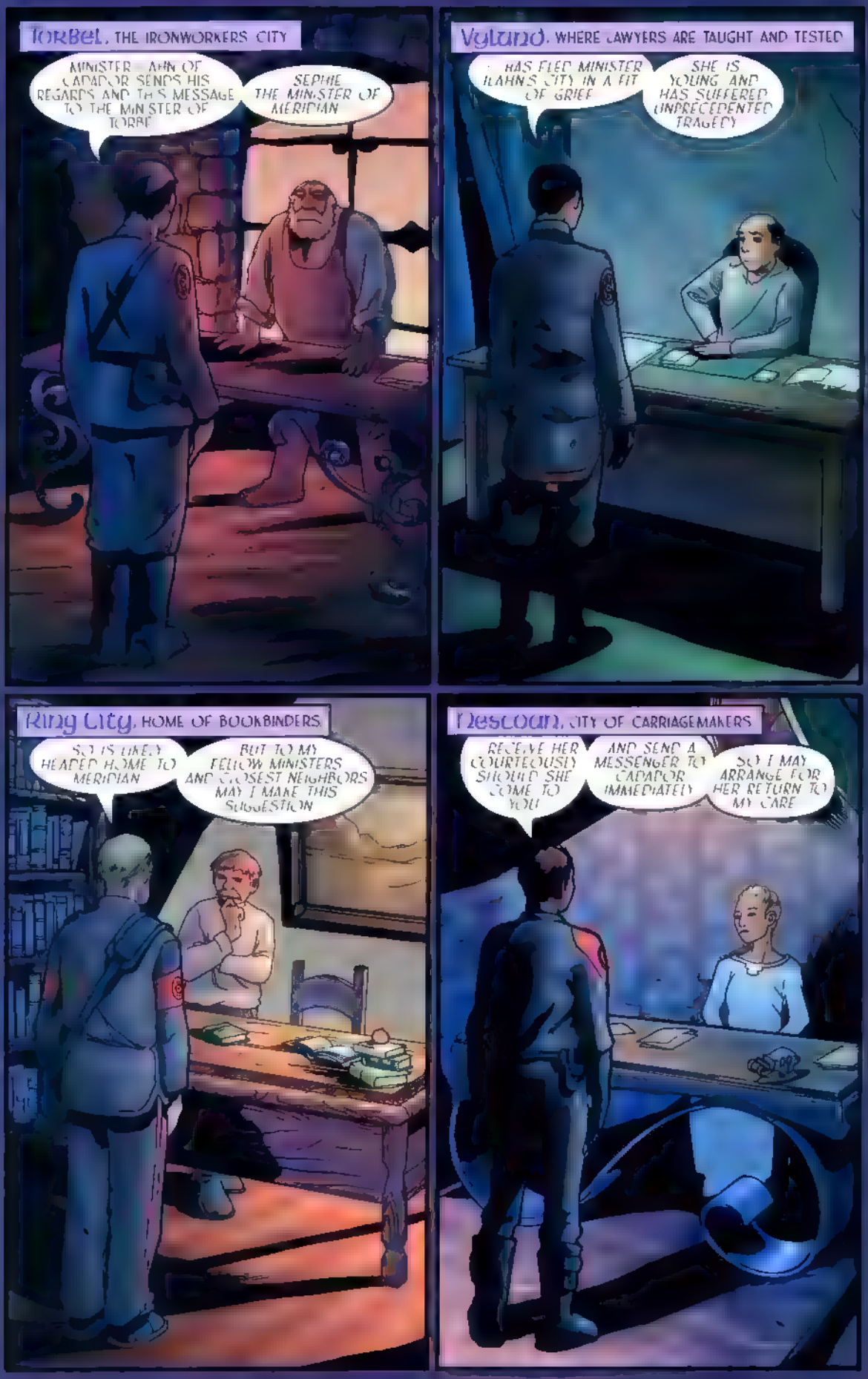
After Ilahn discovers that the sigil endows him with power, he secretly orders an attack on Sephie, arriving in time to "save" her. Ilahn tells Sephie she can trust no one as he whisks her away to Cadador.

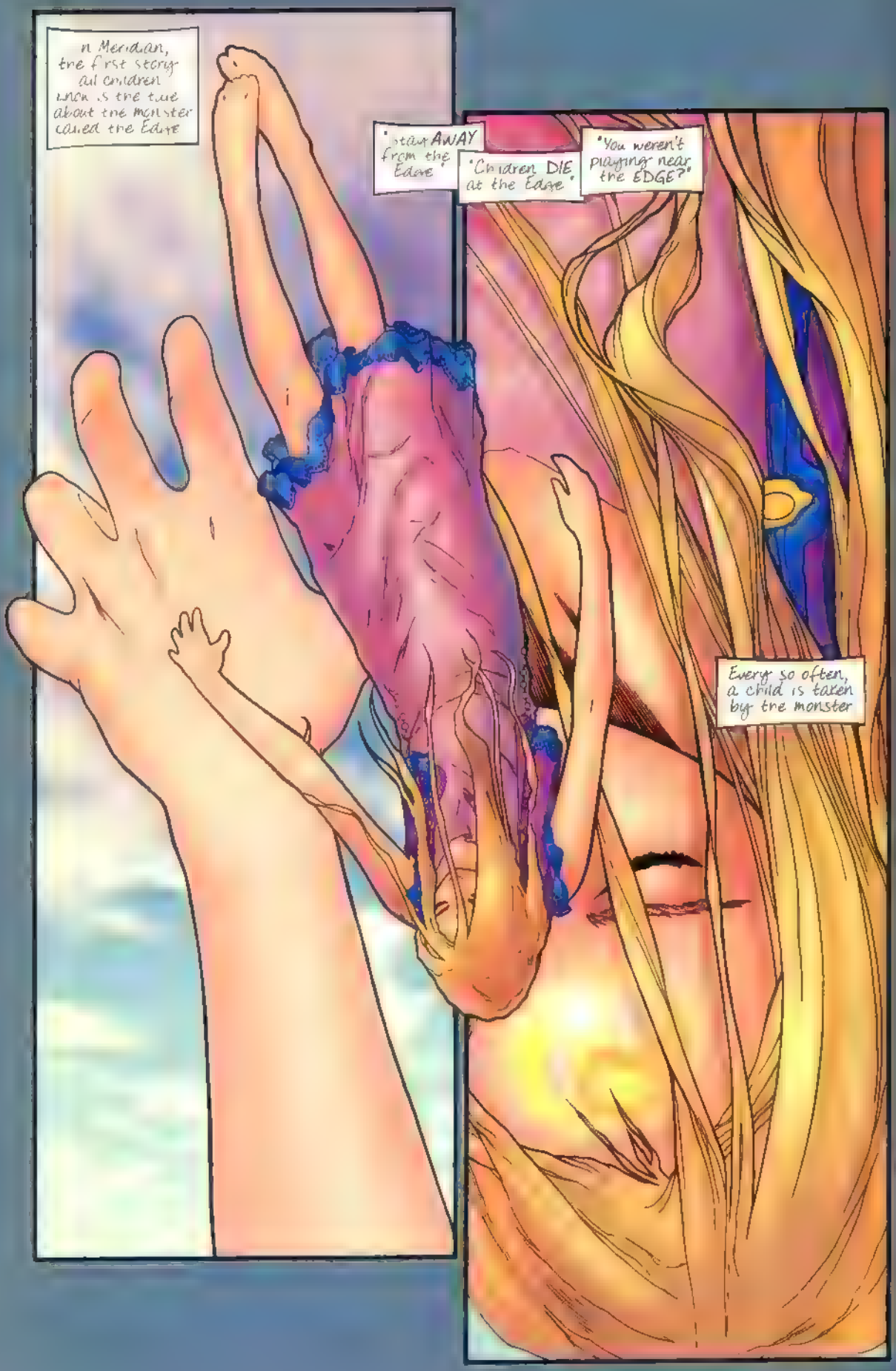
The next morning, soldiers invade Meridian and Sephie's friends disappear through the "center road" tunnels to a secret cave from which they are planning their escape from Meridian. Meanwhile, Sephie spends her first day on Cadador learning the finer points of business from her uncle. The mysterious **Muse of Giatan** appears, offering enigmatic information about the sigils and about a certain portrait Ilahn wears...which holds an image of Sephie's mother. She also lets Ilahn know that a new woman has arrived in Cadador.. one who "looks your opposite but is your like."

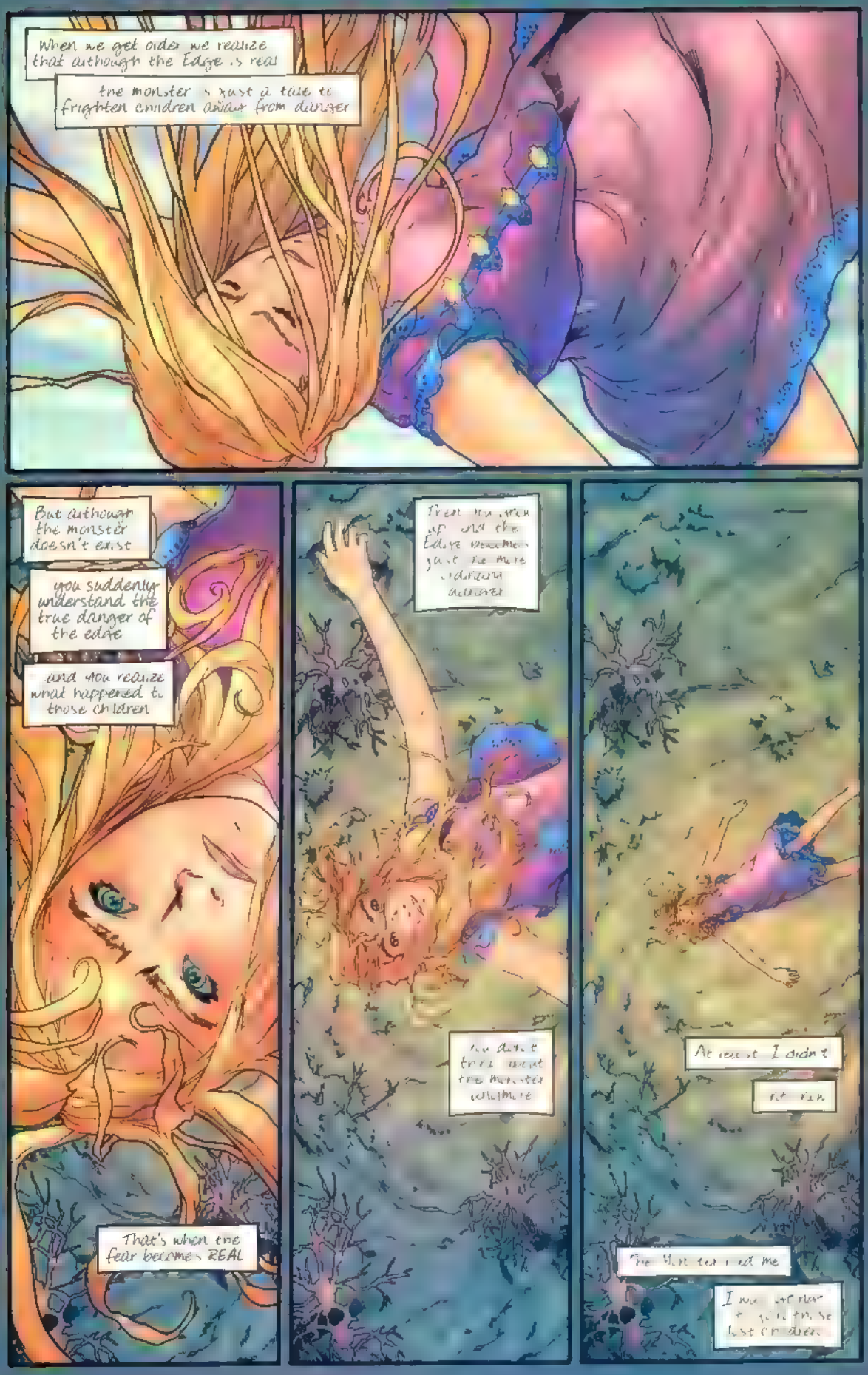
Sephie, disturbed by what she learns about Ilahn, is provoked into a confrontation. She storms away from his estate and sets sail for Meridian. But Ilahn won't give her up so easily, and Cadadorian soldiers follow Sephie. In their attempt to capture her ship, they toss harpoon lines to catch it. But too many lines are cast...!



...and the ship stops suddenly, tossing Sephie over the side. The soldiers watch in horror as Sephie falls to her death...


Torbel, the ironworkers city
Minister Ahn of Cadador sends his regards and this message to the Minister of Torbel
Sephie the Minister of Meridian
Vyland, where lawyers are taught and tested
has fled Minister Ilahn's city in a fit of grief
She is young and has suffered unprecedented tragedy
Ring City, home of bookbinders
So is likely headed home to Meridian
But to my fellow ministers and closest neighbors may I make this suggestion
Nescoun, city of carriagemakers
Receive her courteously should she come to you
And send a messenger to Cadador immediately
So I may arrange for her return to my care


In Meridian, the first story all children learn is the true about the monster called the Edge
"Stay AWAY from the Edge"
"Children DIE at the Edge"
"You weren't playing near the EDGE?"
Every so often, a child is taken by the monster



When we get older we realize that although the Edge is real

the monster is just a tale to frighten children away from danger

But although the monster doesn't exist

you suddenly understand the true danger of the edge

and you realize what happened to those children

That's when the fear becomes REAL

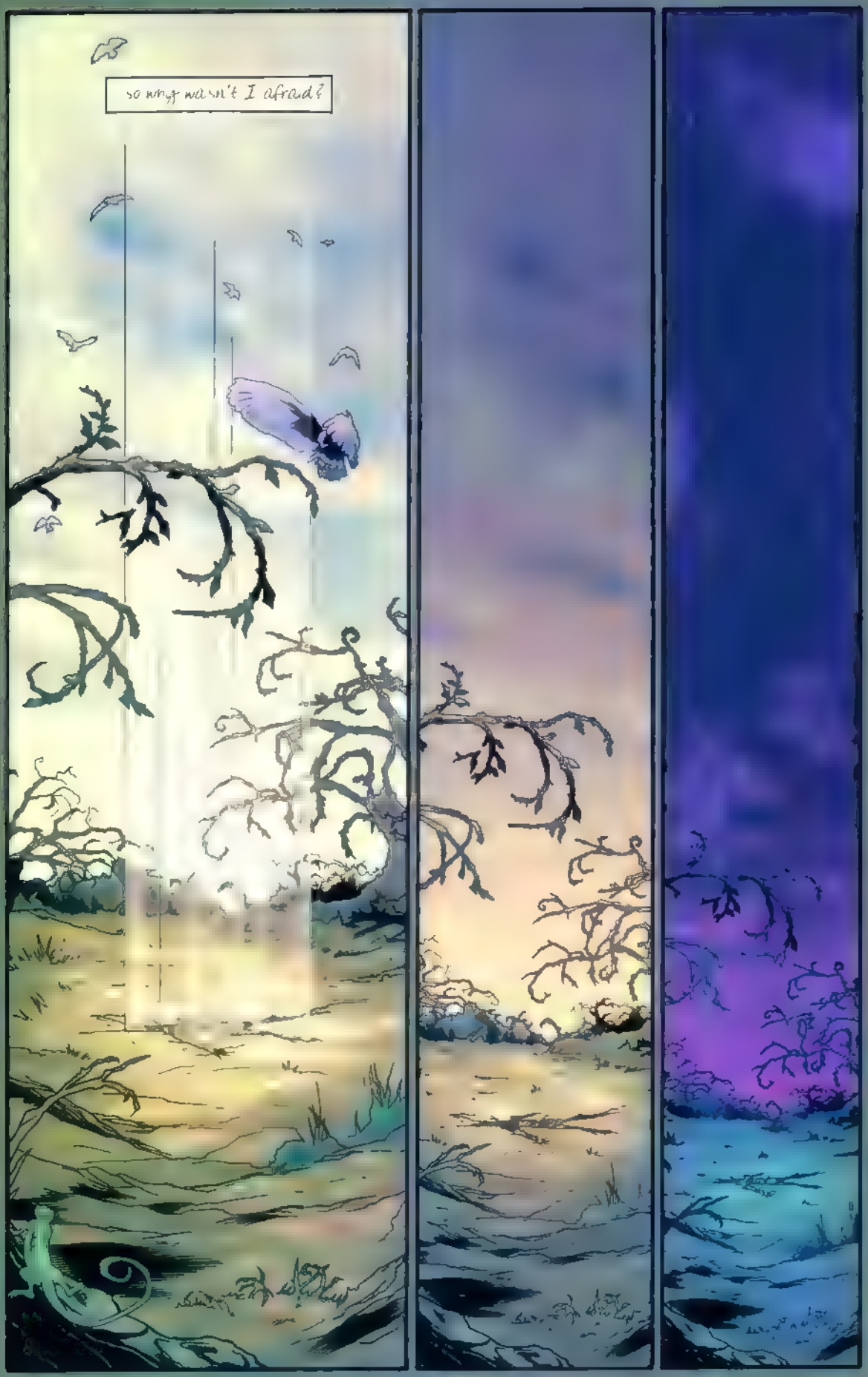
Then you grow up and the Edge becomes just the more ordinary danger

You don't think about the monster anymore

At least I didn't

The Monster had me

I was going to join those lost children

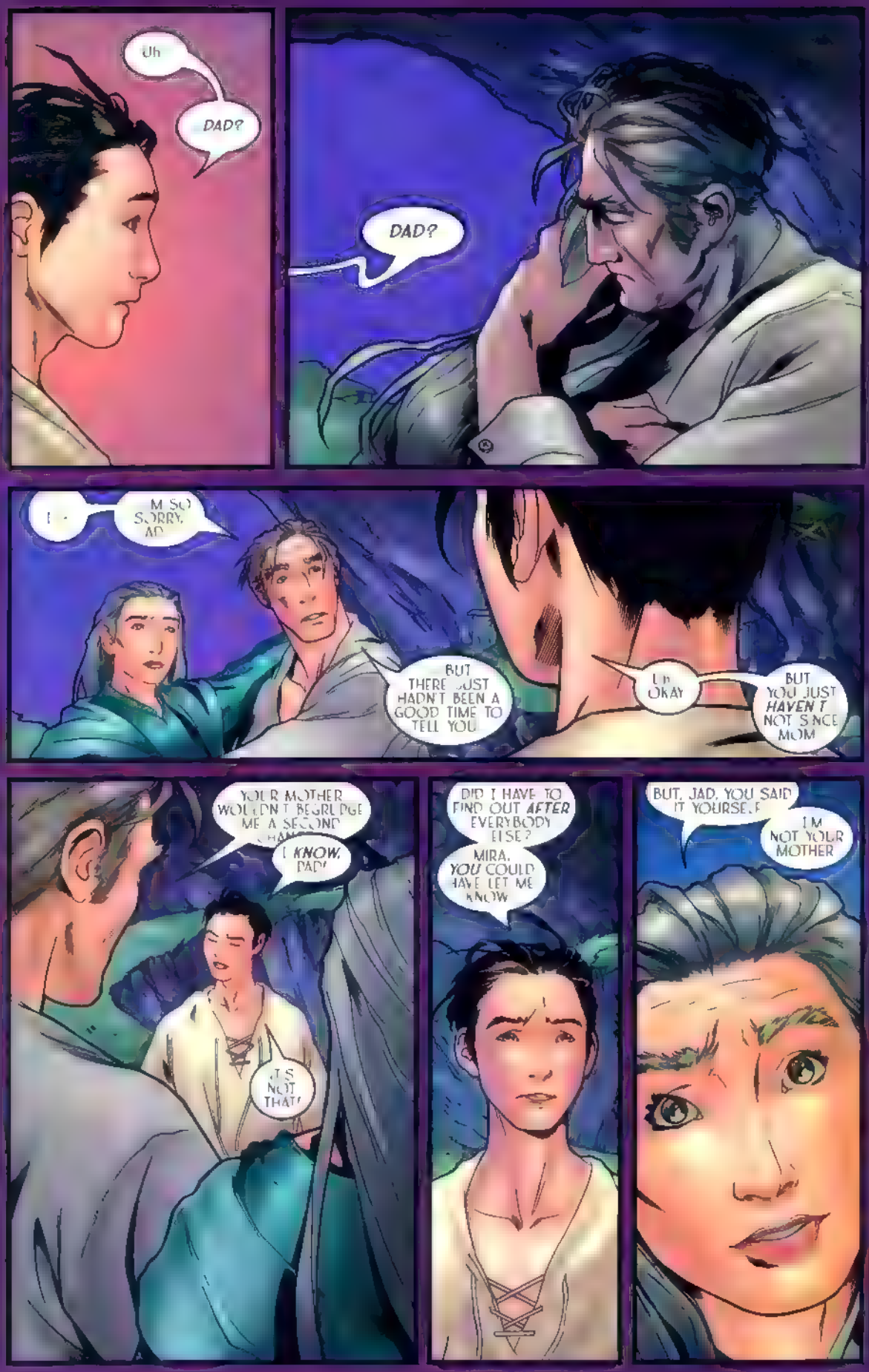

so why wasn't I afraid?

MINISTER RAINE?
HE'S STILL ASLEEP
THE MINISTER WAS UP ALL LAST NIGHT INTERROGATING THAT GROTESQUE WOMAN
THEN THAT WRETCHED NIECE OF HIS SLEEP
HE'S BEEN THROUGH ENOUGH FOR ONE DAY
SERPICO'S TRAGEDY WON'T CHANGE BEFORE MORNING
BEST TO WAIT AND GIVE HIM THE NEWS ABOUT HER DEATH WHEN HE'S RESTED
AYE, WE NEEDN'T ADD PAIN TO PAIN NOW
OR IS IT HIS PAIN OR YOURS THAT CONCERNS YOU?

HO!
LOOK AT ALL THE WORK! LISELA, LOOK AT THE SIZE OF THIS CAVERN! ALL THOSE SHIPS
LEAVING MERIDIAN'S A BIGGER JOB THAN I THOUGHT
ARN, HAS THIS SITE ALWAYS BEEN HERE?
THE SECRET CAVE HIDDEN BY BEACON NOTCH HAS BEEN KEPT QUIET AS AN EMERGENCY HIDEAWAY SINCE THE TIME OF THE FIRST MINISTER OF MERIDIAN
ALTHOUGH MOST OF WHAT'S DOWN HERE WAS BUILT DURING OUR TIME
TUROS BELIEVED IN BEING PEACEFUL, YET PREPARED
HULLO BELOW!
Jh?
SHOULD I SOUND THE ALARM?
NO, THEY'RE OURS SEE MY BROTHER WITH EM?
THAT'S THE LAST GROUP
SO NOW WE JUST *ABANDON* MERIDIAN?
JUST FOR A SHORT TIME ENOS
JUST UNTIL WE GATHER ALLIES AND RETURN TO RECLAIM OUR ISLAND
WE'LL BE BACK WON'T WE JON?
YES

AND IT WILL HAPPEN IN MY LIFETIME
YOU CAN BE SURE OF THAT
WHICH MEANS WE WON'T HAVE TOO LONG TO WAIT
HMPF! FRISHA RESPECT YOUR ELDERS NOW
OR I'LL ASSIGN YOU TO PRIVY DUTY ON OUR JOURNEY
THERE'S DAD!
LOOK AT HIM GO!
THAT'S A SHOCK MIRA
MY DAD MUST BE AWFULLY RELIEVED TO SEE ME
HE'S NOT USUALLY THIS
JON?

ENTHUSIASTIC
OF COURSE HE PROBABLY HEARD ABOUT MY AMAZING ROOFTOP ESCAPE FROM CAPADORIAN SOLDIERS
BUT I CAN'T BELIEVE HE DIDN'T ALSO HEAR THAT I WAS OKAY
IT'S GOOD TO KNOW HE CARES BUT
UH?
MIRA!
I WAS SO AFRAID
OH JON


Uh
DAD?
DAD?
I'M SO SORRY, AD
BUT THERE JUST HADN'T BEEN A GOOD TIME TO TELL YOU
Uh OKAY
BUT YOU JUST HAVEN'T NOT SINCE MOM
YOUR MOTHER WOULDN'T BEGRUDGE ME A SECOND
I KNOW, DAD!
IT'S NOT THAT!
DID I HAVE TO FIND OUT AFTER EVERYBODY ELSE?
MIRA, YOU COULD HAVE LET ME KNOW
BUT, JAD, YOU SAID IT YOURSELF
I'M NOT YOUR MOTHER

ILAHN'S CASTLE
THE PRIDE OF CADADOR
MY NEW HOME
NOK NOK
YESSSS?
GOOD MORNING!
I'D LIKE TO ARRANGE AN APPOINTMENT WITH MINISTER ILAHN
YOU ARE CLEARLY THE MAJOR DOMO OF HIS ESTATE
I'M CERTAIN YOU COULD ARRANGE IT
THERE ARE PROTOCOLS
WHICH ARE DESIGNED TO CONTROL THOSE WHO MINDLESSLY TAKE DIRECTION
NOT FOR INDEPENDENT THINKERS LIKE US
CERTAINLY YOU COULD JUST SLIP ME IN ON HIS AGENDA
Hmmmm.
COME BACK THIS AFTERNOON I'LL SEE WHAT'S AVAILABLE

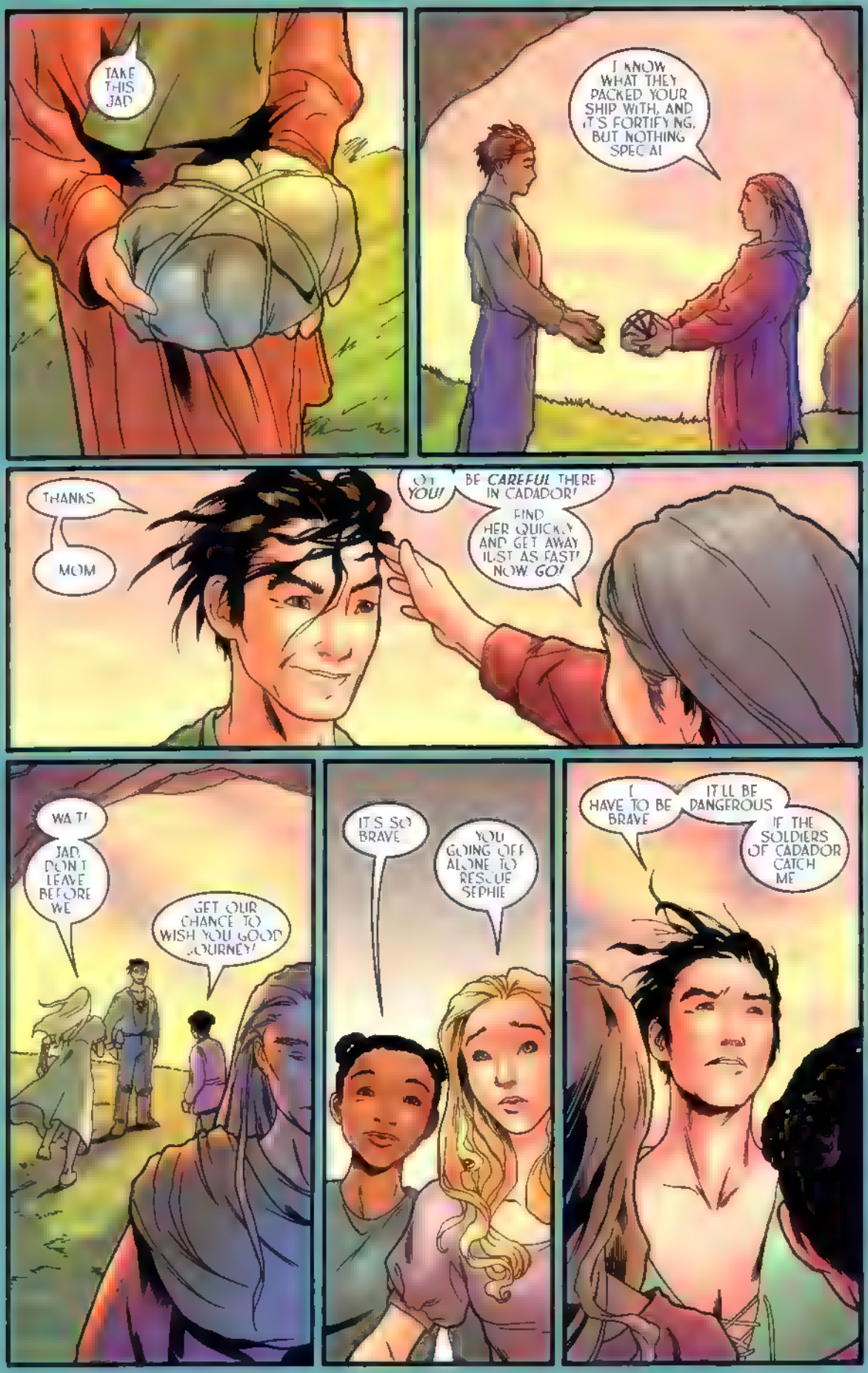
LOROS!!
SHHHH KLEK
YES, MY MINISTER?
I'M ANXIOUS TO HEAR WHAT CAPTAIN PATON HAS TO SAY ABOUT WHY MY NE... HAS NOT BEEN RETURNED TO ME
YES, MY MINISTER
STORM

MINISTER HAHN
WELCOME CAPTAIN PATGIEN!
COME IN
PLEASE SIT DOWN
EXPLAIN YOUR TARDY RETURN TO ME
MAKE IT GOOD
IN SHORT... WE FAILED MY MINISTER
THE MINISTER OF MERDIAN'S SHIP WAS SPEARED
BUT SHE WAS NOT SECURED TO IT
WE WERE UNABLE TO STOP HER
SHE FELL
YOU'RE TELLING ME SHE'S DEAD?!

SEPHIE'S GONE
I'M STAGGERED
NO DON'T GET UP
I NEED TO MAKE YOU UNDERSTAND SOMETHING
YOU DO REALIZE WHAT AN ASTOUNDING FAVOR THIS REPRESENTS?
PERHAPS THE TOUCH OF MY HAND ON YOUR SHOULDER
OR THE POWER THAT HAND WIELDS
WILL PROVIDE A REMINDER TO YOU!
AAAAAAHH
TO BE MORE CAREFUL IN THE FUTURE!

SNNNh!
BOSCAU, OROSI
MY INTERVIEW WITH THE CAPTAIN IS OVER
CLEAN UP THE MESS
Oh DERIA
FORGIVE ME
I'VE DESTROYED THE LAST OF YOU!
STUPID STUBBORN GIRL

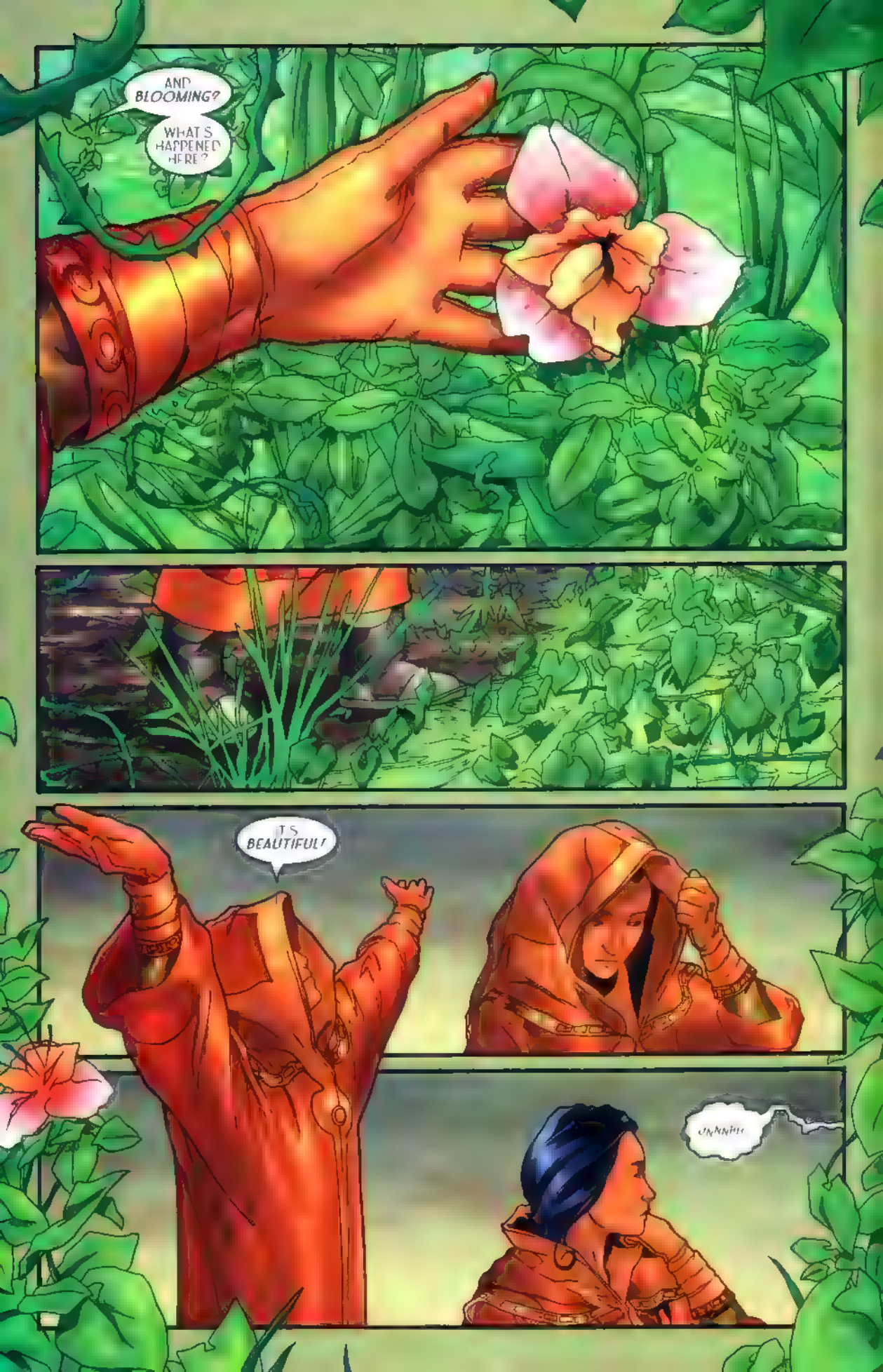
WHAT'S HAVING MER'D AN WITHOUT YOU?
IS THAT THE LAST OF THEM?
THE VERY LAST
WHEN WE RETURN IT WILL BE TO STAY
NOW ALL THAT'S LEFT IS TO BOARD OUR PEOPLE AND LEAVE HOME
THROUGH THAT GAPING HOLE THOSE CADADORS HAVE LEFT IN WHAT THEY PITIFULLY CALL SECURITY
WE'D HAVE DONE BETTER
I DON'T SEE WHY WE DON'T TAKE THEM ON NOW
I'M TOO OLD FOR THIS LEAVE TAKING GAMBIT
WHAT IF WE DON'T FIND ALIES?
WE WILL RHUS
CADADOR HAS POWER BUT MER'DIAN HAS STRENGTH AND PATIENCE
THEY'LL COME TO RUE THE DAY

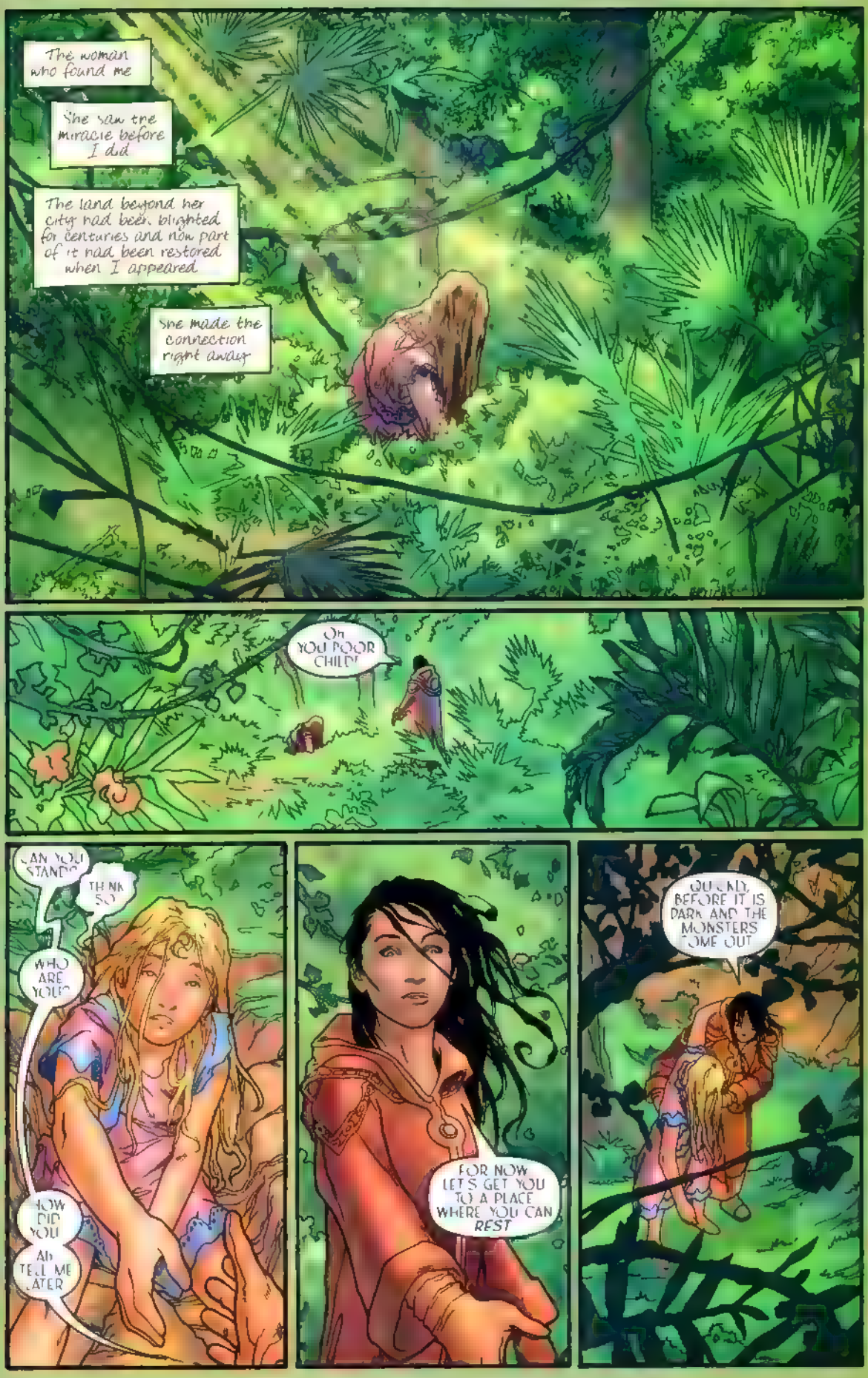

TAKE THIS JAD
I KNOW WHAT THEY PACKED YOUR SHIP WITH, AND IT'S FORTIFYING, BUT NOTHING SPECIAL
THANKS MOM
OH YOU! BE CAREFUL THERE IN CADADOR! FIND HER QUICKLY AND GET AWAY JUST AS FAST! NOW GO!
WAIT JAD, DON'T LEAVE BEFORE WE GET OUR CHANCE TO WISH YOU GOOD JOURNEY!
IT'S SO BRAVE
YOU GOING OFF ALONE TO RESCUE SEPHIE
I HAVE TO BE BRAVE
IT'LL BE DANGEROUS IF THE SOLDIERS OF CADADOR CATCH ME

JAD
YA!!!!
THERE'S ONE NOW
AND YOU'RE HIS PRISONER!
DID I NTERRUPT?
I JUST CAME BY TO REMIND YOU TO STAY OUT OF TROUBLE IN CAPADOR
MEET UP WITH US AT RING CITY AS SOON AS YOU CAN
SURE DAD
HEE HEE HEE HEE HEE HEE HEE HEE
IF YOU CAN'T FIND HER, LEAVE A MESSAGE AND MOVE ON
JAD--
DON'T PUT YOURSELF IN UNNECESSARY DANGER
PLEASE
BECAUSE NO ONE COULD REPLACE YOU
I'LL BE CAREFUL, DAD

GATHER AROUND, EVERYONE
I'M NOT MUCH OF AN ORATOR, BUT SOME WORDS NEED TO BE SAID
IT'S TIME TO GREET OUR FUTURE
WE MUST BE OPEN TO THE POSSIBILITY THAT OUR RETURN MAY COME A FAR TIME FROM NOW.
BUT, ALTHOUGH WE ARE LEAVING THE *LAND* OF MERIDIAN BEHIND
NO MATTER WHERE THIS WIND TAKES US, NO MATTER HOW FAR OR HOW LONG
AS LONG AS WE CARRY HER *ESSENCE* WITHIN US
WE WILL ALWAYS BE THE PEOPLE OF MERIDIAN
WELL SAID
BON JOURNEY TAO!
HURRY BACK TO US!

AAAH!
IT'S HEALTHY?


AND BLOOMING?
WHAT'S HAPPENED HERE?
IT'S BEAUTIFUL!
UNNNH!!


The woman who found me
She saw the miracle before I did
The land beyond her city had been blighted for centuries and now part of it had been restored when I appeared
She made the connection right away
OH YOU POOR CHILD!
CAN YOU STAND?
I THINK SO
WHO ARE YOU?
HOW DID YOU
AH TELL ME LATER
FOR NOW LET'S GET YOU TO A PLACE WHERE YOU CAN REST
QUICKLY, BEFORE IT IS DARK AND THE MONSTERS COME OUT

I was still reeling from the shock of my strange and unexpected survival.
I had fallen from the sky and I was ALIVE
It was much later when I learned how much more I'd done
and how much more I COULD do
LET'S GO HOME

The CrossGen Universe created by Mark Alessi & Gina M. Villa

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Far away...

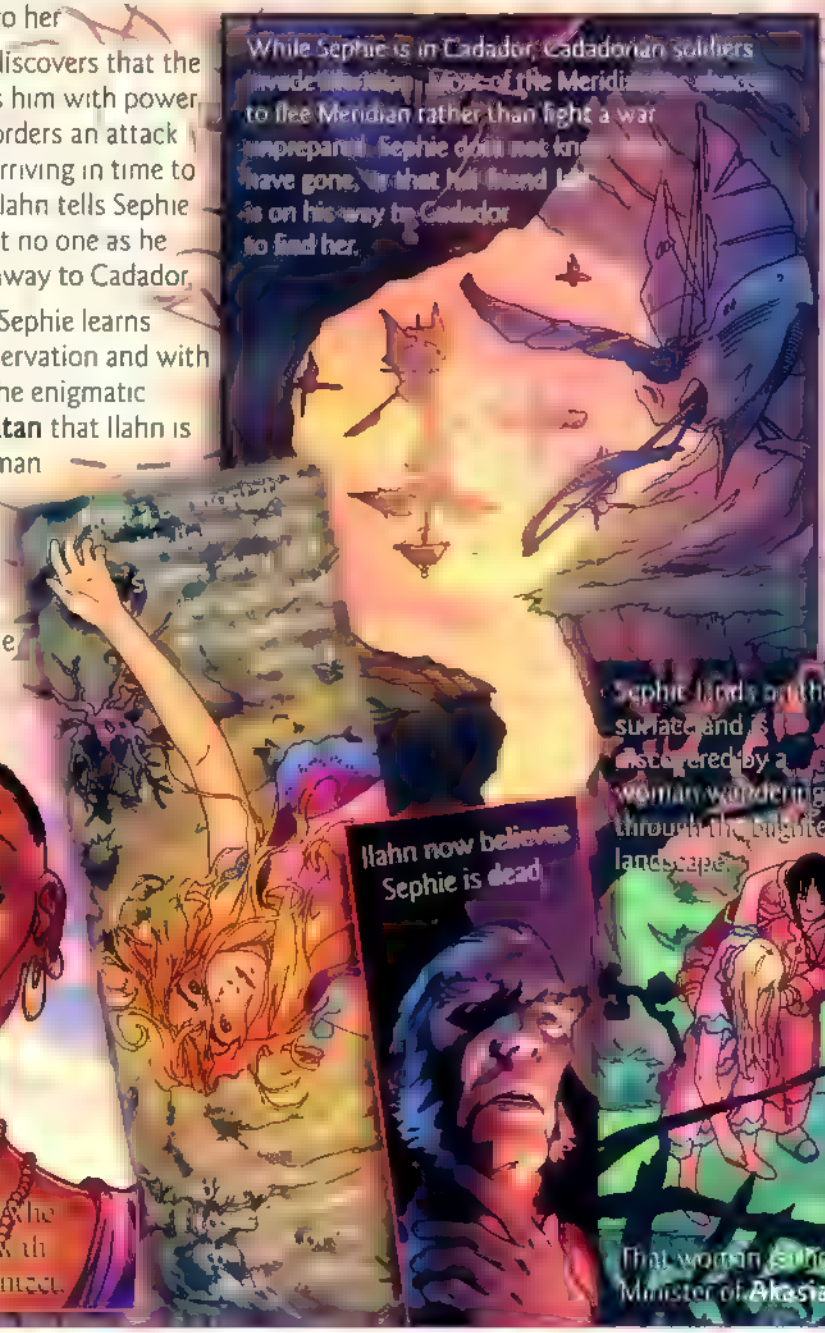
on the world of Demetria, explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

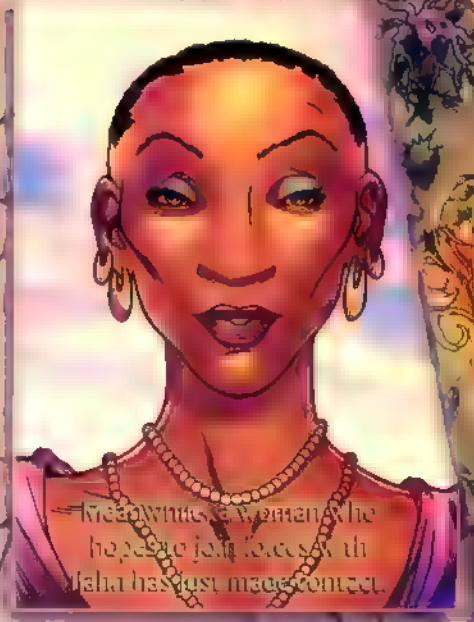
One of these islands is **Meridian**, home of shipbuilders and **Sephie**, the 16 year old daughter of Minister Turos. Sephie's life has been spent being groomed to someday take over the ruling of Meridian.

One day, Sephie's **Uncle Ilahn**, Minister of the neighboring island of Cadador, meets with Turos, Sephie's father. The brothers are engulfed by light and left with mysterious sigils. Turos suffers a fatal heart attack. Sephie finds that his sigil has transferred to her.

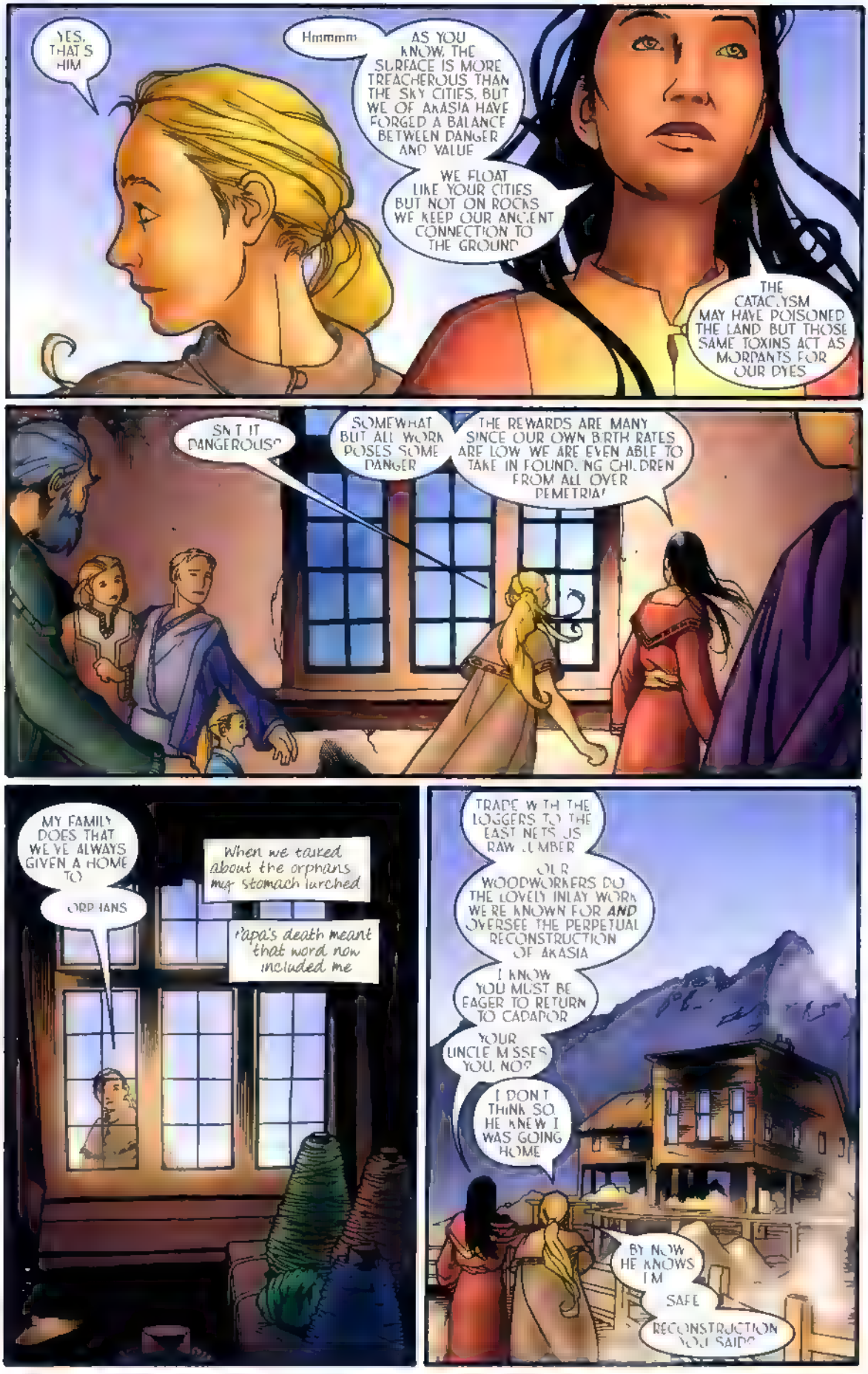
After Ilahn discovers that the sigil endows him with power, he secretly orders an attack on Sephie, arriving in time to "save" her. Ilahn tells Sephie she can trust no one as he whisks her away to Cadador.

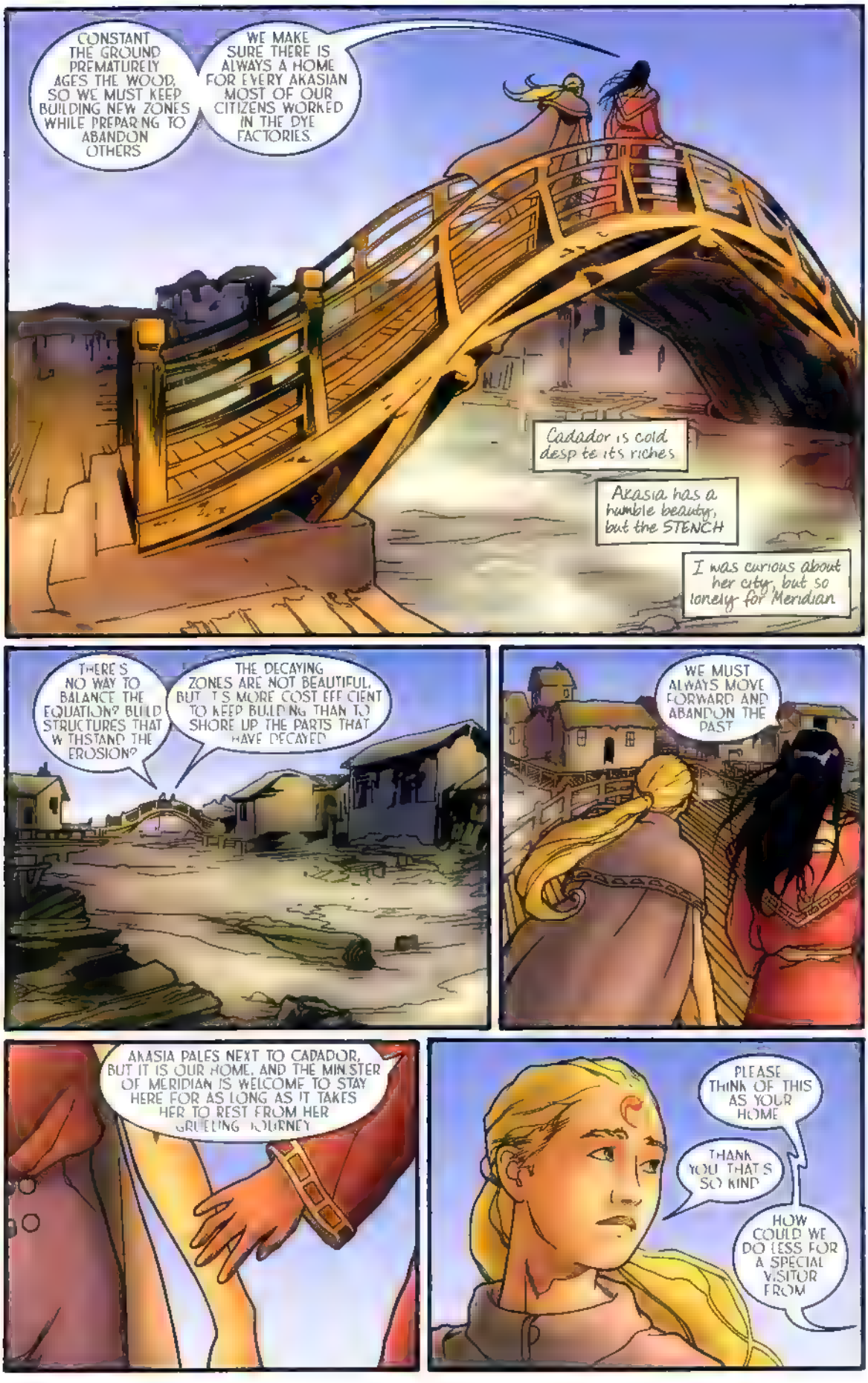
In Cadador, Sephie learns through observation and with hints from the enigmatic **Muse of Giatan** that Ilahn is not a good man and has some kind of tie to her mother. She also finds she has the power of renewal.

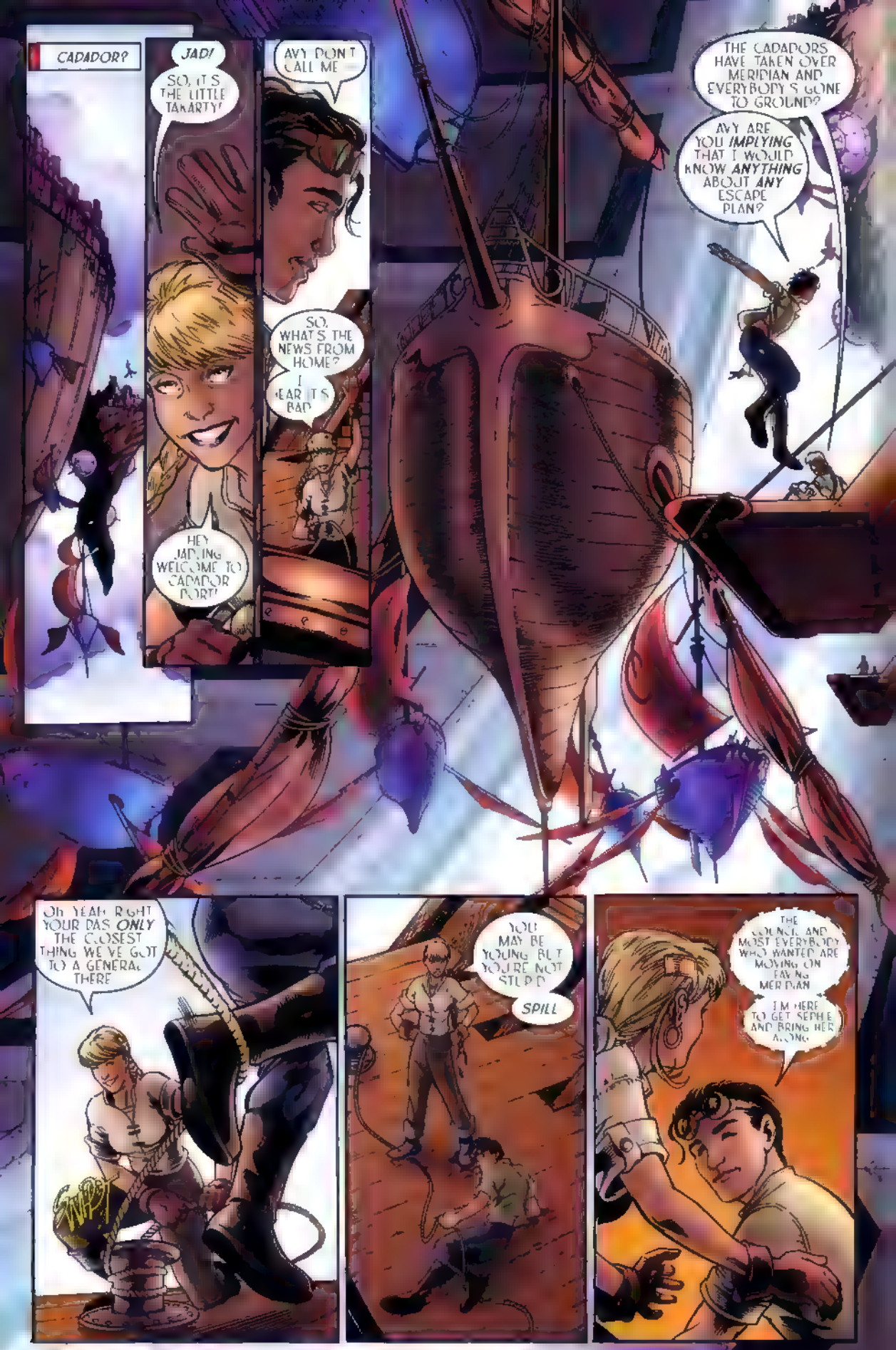




LAST NIGHT, AS YOU WERE SUFFERING THROUGH THE TRAUMA OF YOUR LANDFALL...
I UNDERSTOOD YOU TO SAY YOU WERE THE MINISTER OF MERIDIAN
BUT I'VE MET TUROS
I'M HIS DAUGHTER
MY FATHER DIED VERY RECENTLY
I AM MIN STER NOW
Maraya, the Minister of Akasia was so welcoming. The people were all so kind. They made me want to stay there forever
The city seemed as warm as the dyes Akasia is known for
I know better now
EEEW
SO A SHIP FROM MERIDIAN BROUGHT YOU HERE?
NO A SHIP FROM CAPADOR I WAS STAYING WITH MY UNCLE ILAHN, BUT I'M ON MY WAY HOME NOW
I'VE NEVER BEEN TO A SURFACE CITY BEFORE
THEN YOU MUST HAVE A FULL TOUR
WEAVER'S GUILD
WE'RE NOT RICH LIKE CAPADOR BUT OUR DYES KEEP US PROSPEROUS IN OUR OWN WAY
LITTLE COMMERCE HAPPENS HERE - WE'RE DEPENDENT ON THE TRADE SHIPS
IS YOUR UNCLE ILAHN THE SAME ILAHN WHO IS MINISTER OF CAPADOR?


YES, THAT'S HIM
Hmmmm
AS YOU KNOW, THE SURFACE IS MORE TREACHEROUS THAN THE SKY CITIES, BUT WE OF AKASIA HAVE FORGED A BALANCE BETWEEN DANGER AND VALUE
WE FLOAT LIKE YOUR CITIES BUT NOT ON ROCKS WE KEEP OUR ANCIENT CONNECTION TO THE GROUND
THE CATACLYSM MAY HAVE POISONED THE LAND, BUT THOSE SAME TOXINS ACT AS MORDANTS FOR OUR DYES
SN'T IT DANGEROUS?
SOMEWHAT, BUT ALL WORK POSES SOME DANGER
THE REWARDS ARE MANY SINCE OUR OWN BIRTH RATES ARE LOW WE ARE EVEN ABLE TO TAKE IN FOUND NG CHILDREN FROM ALL OVER PEMETRIA!
MY FAMILY DOES THAT WE'VE ALWAYS GIVEN A HOME TO
ORPHANS
When we talked about the orphans my stomach lurched
Papa's death meant that word now included me
TRADE W TH THE LOGGERS TO THE EAST NETS JS RAW LUMBER
OUR WOODWORKERS DO THE LOVELY INLAY WORK WE'RE KNOWN FOR *AND* OVERSEE THE PERPETUAL RECONSTRUCTION OF AKASIA
I KNOW YOU MUST BE EAGER TO RETURN TO CADAPOR
YOUR UNCLE M SSES YOU, NO?
I DON T THINK SO HE KNEW I WAS GOING HOME
BY NOW HE KNOWS I'M SAFE
RECONSTRUCTION YOU SAID?


CONSTANT THE GROUND PREMATURELY AGES THE WOOD, SO WE MUST KEEP BUILDING NEW ZONES WHILE PREPARING TO ABANDON OTHERS
WE MAKE SURE THERE IS ALWAYS A HOME FOR EVERY AKASIAN. MOST OF OUR CITIZENS WORKED IN THE DYE FACTORIES.
Cadador is cold despite its riches
Akasia has a humble beauty, but the STENCH
I was curious about her city, but so lonely for Meridian
THERE'S NO WAY TO BALANCE THE EQUATION? BUILD STRUCTURES THAT WITHSTAND THE EROSION?
THE DECAYING ZONES ARE NOT BEAUTIFUL, BUT IT'S MORE COST EFFICIENT TO KEEP BUILDING THAN TO SHORE UP THE PARTS THAT HAVE DECAYED.
WE MUST ALWAYS MOVE FORWARD AND ABANDON THE PAST
AKASIA PALES NEXT TO CADADOR, BUT IT IS OUR HOME. AND THE MINISTER OF MERIDIAN IS WELCOME TO STAY HERE FOR AS LONG AS IT TAKES HER TO REST FROM HER GRUELING JOURNEY.
PLEASE THINK OF THIS AS YOUR HOME
THANK YOU. THAT'S SO KIND.
HOW COULD WE DO LESS FOR A SPECIAL VISITOR FROM


CADADOR?
JADI
SO, IT'S THE LITTLE TAKARTY!
HEY JADI, WELCOME TO CADADOR PORT!
AVY DON'T CALL ME
SO, WHAT'S THE NEWS FROM HOME? I HEAR IT'S BAD
THE CADADORS HAVE TAKEN OVER MERIDIAN AND EVERYBODY'S GONE TO GROUND?
AVY ARE YOU *IMPLYING* THAT I WOULD KNOW *ANYTHING* ABOUT *ANY* ESCAPE PLAN?
OH YEAH, RIGHT YOUR DAS *ONLY* THE CLOSEST THING WE'VE GOT TO A GENERAL THERE
SNAP!
YOU MAY BE YOUNG BUT YOU'RE NOT STUPID
SPILL
THE COUNCIL AND MOST EVERYBODY WHO WANTED ARE MOVING ON FAYNS MERIDIAN
I'M HERE TO GET SEPHIE AND BRING HER ALONG

LEAVING MER PIANO
IS THAT BAD?
JAD MY CONTRACT'S UP SOON AND I WAS WANTING TO GO HOME
I'M SORRY AVY IT'S NOT A GOOD IDEA RIGHT NOW
YOU COULD MEET US AT
SHHH! WALLS HAVE EARS
WATCH YOUR BACK AND YOUR MOUTH WHILE YOU'RE IN CAPADOR JAD
THEY THINK ILAHN'S A HERO HERE
THIS ROUTE COMES OUT TOPSIDE
KEEP TO THE SHADOWS, AD-NG. WE STAND OUT IN THIS BIG CITY
I'LL KEEP AN EYE ON YOUR SKYSHIP... KEEP IT READY TO LEAVE WHEN YOU GET BACK
GOOD LUCK!
AVY!
ALL I'VE GOT TO DO IS SNEAK ONTO ILAHN'S PRIVATE STAND
HOW HARD COULD THAT BE?

LOOK! IT BEGINS
THE TIME OF VISION THE SHIFTING OF INEVITABILITIES FAVORS THE RED ONCE AGAIN
I SEE IT SO
NOK NOK

YES, LOROS?
MINISTER JAHN I MAY HAVE
I HAVE -
MAY I HAVE -
THE POINT LOROS!
COME TO IT QUICKLY
THE WOMAN I SPOKE TO YOU OF YESTERDAY?
SHE'S HERE NOW
BUT I WILL OF COURSE SEND HER AWAY
ABSOLUTELY NOT!
SEND HER IN
I KEEP MY WORD AND MY APPOINTMENTS
GOOD
I ADMIRE THAT IN MY TEACHERS

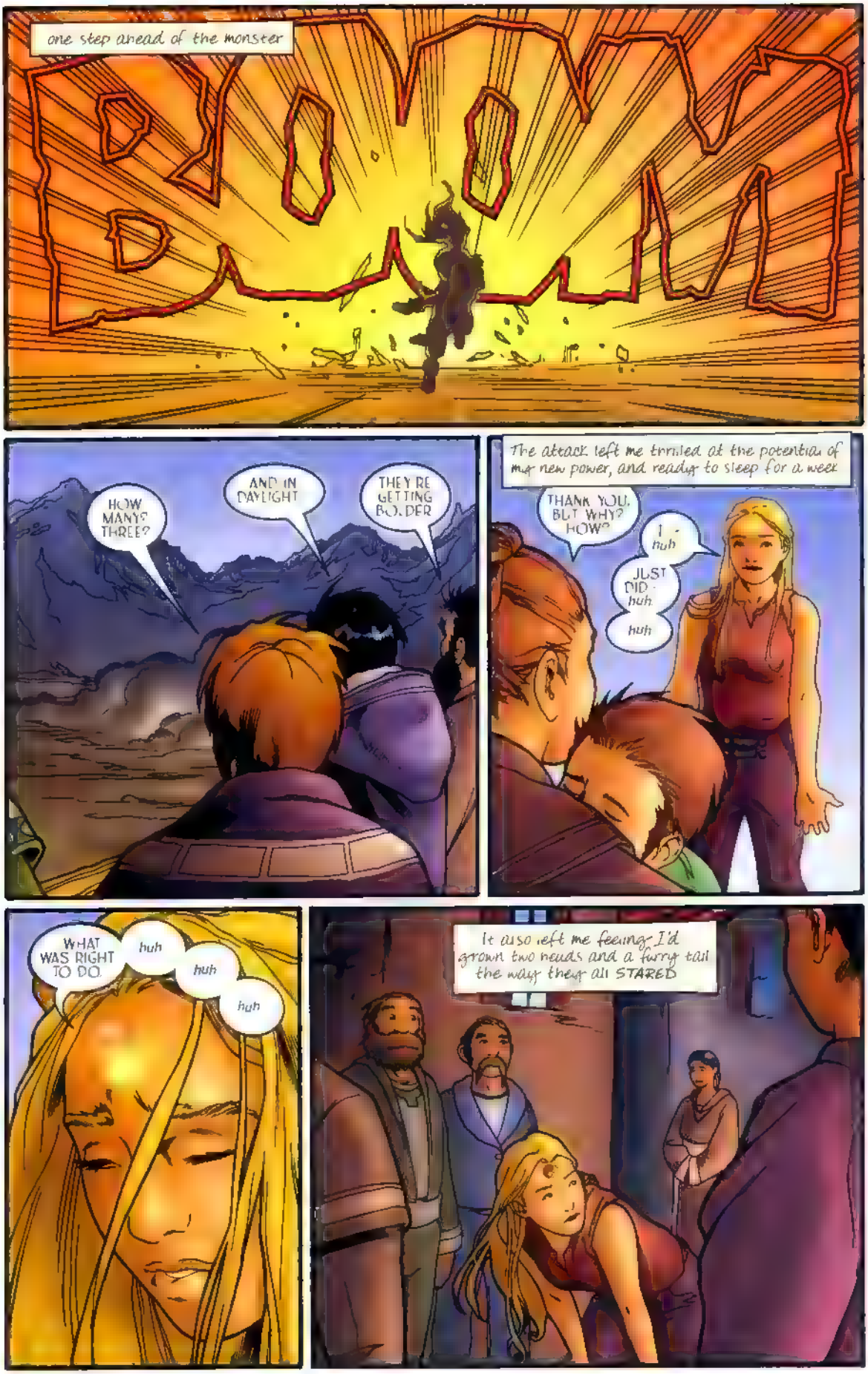
GREETINGS LAHN MIN STER OI CAPADOR
I AM REESHA TERAMU OF ALROUD
WORD OF YOUR BUSINESS ACUMEN HAS BROUGHT ME HERE FROM THE FAR SIDE OF DEMETRIA TO LEARN AT THE SIDE OF THE ONLY MAN IN THIS WORLD WHO HAS SOMETHING TO TEACH ME
YOU HAVE NO HEIR
YOUR KNOWLEDGE NEEDS A POINT OF TRANSFER TO FUTURE GENERATIONS
YOU'LL FIND THAT I MAKE AN IDEAL VESSEL FOR YOUR SUCCESSFUL PHILOSOPHIES OF BUSINESS
SO YOU HAVE SIMPLY DECIDED TO ADOPT ME AS YOUR MENTOR
HOW ADMIRABLE
TWO WINDS SPIN TOGETHER TO MAKE A FEARFUL STORM
TWO FATES ENTWINE INTO ONE FUTURE
THE MIN STER OF CAPADOR HIDES THE LOSS OF AN HEIR WITH A MATCHING SOUL

ALTHOUGH THE HERO IS NOT AS LOST AS HE IMAGINES
WHY ARE THEY RUNNING?
Oh NO TO HIGH GROUND! QUICKLY!
CELANAUG!
THEY'RE FERAL, TOXIN-DWELLERS BUT IT'S DAYLIGHT!
HURRY WE MUST STAY TO THE GOOD AREAS!
NO SEPHIE - THIS WAY
BUT LOOK!
Realization of the danger posed by the monsters of Akasia reached my brain too late
my heart had already gone out to the child caught in its path

I'd never been fearful.
Papa even described me as reckless
SEPHIE, NO!
WE CAN'T LOSE YOU!
YOU WON'T!
but the feeling that hit me, seeing that boy in danger
KRA
CRA
K
the sudden fire inside me came from someplace new
JUMP!
and there was NOTHING that was going to stop me from saving him!
Suddenly, I was more than Sephie! I was a mystic goddess of protection!
While I was filled with life and strength, no other lives would be lost!

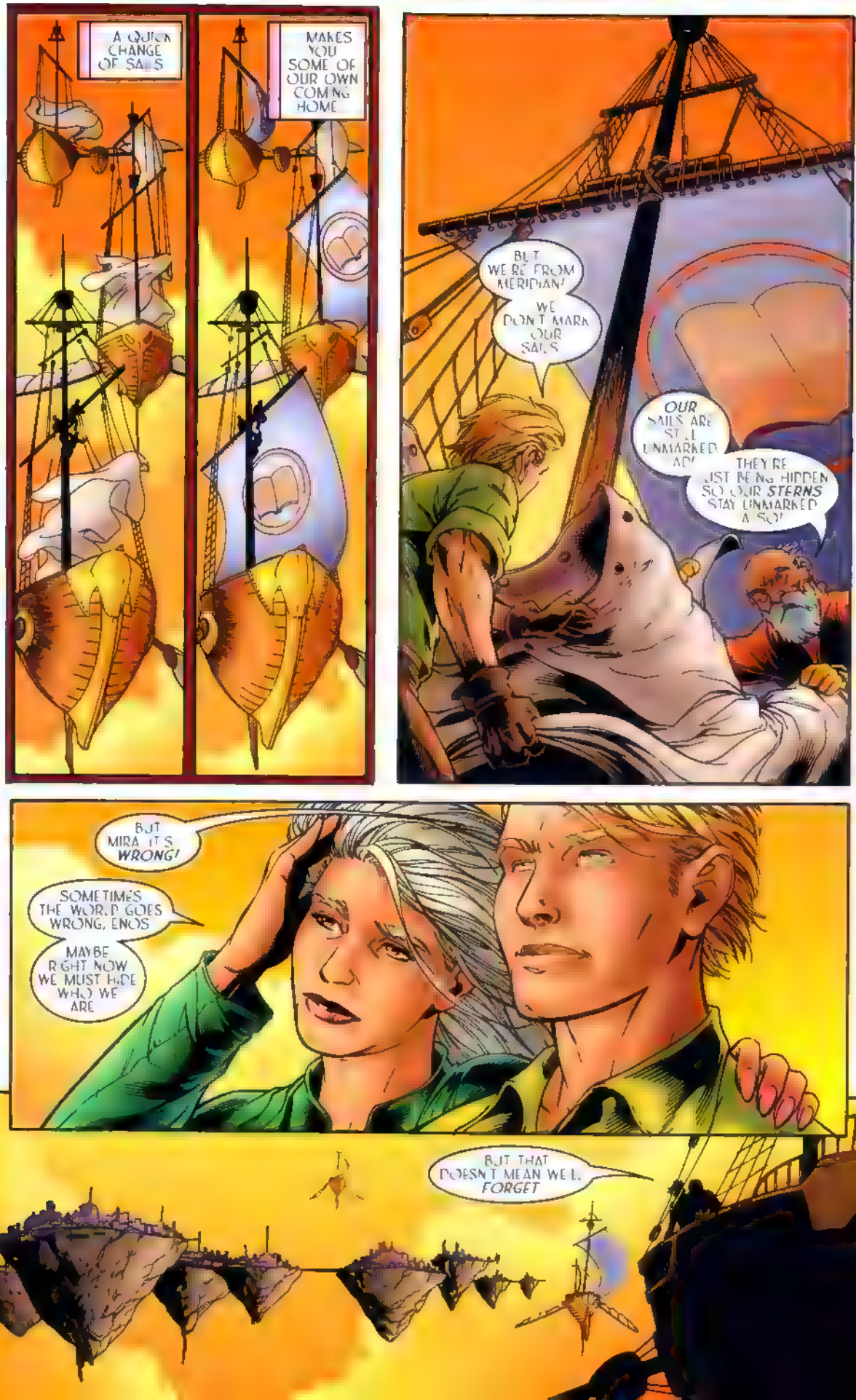
KERAK
No matter what kind of monsters I had to face
For an instant, I thought I'd reached a perfect understanding of what I'd been given the sign of power
KERAAAAK
a vision that slipped out of my head as the decaying boards under my feet gave way
AAAAH!
CRUNCH
and I felt my confidence drop down past my feet into the pit

until I spotted the cetanaug's cold eyes below
No snarly-faced toxin-licker was going to stop ME!
This time, when I MADE it happen, I was AWARE of the power coming from me
I could feel the fibers repairing themselves
as I FORCED it all whole again!
The monster couldn't break through wood
So I poured everything I had inside into creating an avenue of escape


one step ahead of the monster
BOOM
HOW MANY? THREE?
AND IN DAYLIGHT
THEY'RE GETTING BOLDER
The attack left me thrilled at the potential of my new power, and ready to sleep for a week
THANK YOU. BUT WHY? HOW?
I - huh
JUST DID - huh
huh
WHAT WAS RIGHT TO DO.
huh
huh
huh
It also left me feeling I'd grown two heads and a furry tail the way they all STARED

RING CITY IN SIGHT! WE'LL MAKE PORT WITHIN THE HOUR
LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE SENDING OUT A GREETER SHIP
WITH ITS SAILS SET FOR MAXIMUM SPEED
THEY'RE IN A DARNED HURRY
HOPE IT ISN'T BAD NEWS
HULLO, PLAINSAILS! YOU'RE FROM MERIDIAN RIGHT?

WE HEARD ALL ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED TO SEPHIE
AHN'S SENT MESSENGERS TO ALL THE CITIES
NO ONE'S TO GIVE HER ANY ASSISTANCE
AND THE MOUTHPIECES DIDN'T COME ALONE
SINCE WE'RE THE CLOSEST TO MERIDAN, THEY SENT A SQUAD OF CAPADORIAN SOLDIERS TO KEEP US HONEST
THEY'RE ALL OVER THE CITY, *KEEPING THE PEACE*
NOTHING LIKE THE WAY I HEAR THEY DID ON YOUR ISLAND BUT WE'RE KEEPING CAREFUL
SINCE WE ALWAYS PROMISED TO HAVE YOU WE'D NEVER TURN YOU AWAY
SWEET
BUT RING CITY CAN'T RISK TAKING IN *MERIDIANITES* RIGHT NOW
SO WE NEED TO HIDE YOU IN PLAIN SIGHT

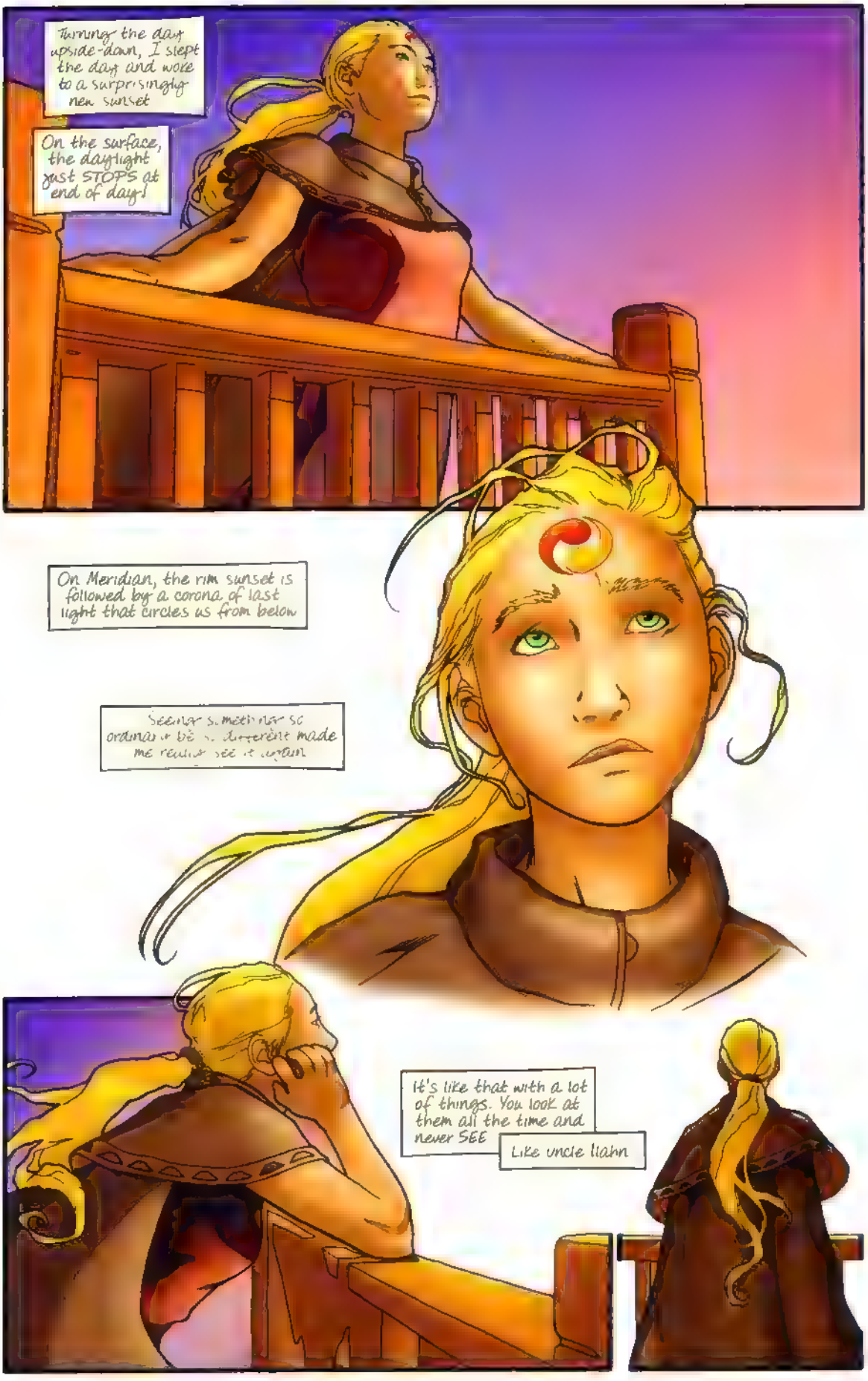

A QUICK CHANGE OF SAILS
MAKES YOU SOME OF OUR OWN COMING HOME
BUT WE'RE FROM MERIDIAN!
WE DON'T MARK OUR SAILS
OUR SAILS ARE STILL UNMARKED, AD!
THEY'RE JUST BEING HIDDEN SO OUR STERNS STAY UNMARKED, A SO!
BUT MIRA IT'S WRONG!
SOMETIMES THE WORLD GOES WRONG, ENOS
MAYBE RIGHT NOW WE MUST HIDE WHO WE ARE
BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN WE'LL FORGET

I'M LOSING PATIENCE MIN STER MARAYA
HOW FAR INTO THE WASTELAND ARE YOU DRAGGING US?
NOT MUCH FARTHER
I THOUGHT THE COUNSELORS OF ARMS A DESERVED PROOF OF MY WORTHY STORY
HERE
SO IT'S TRUE
OH! I DIDN'T REALIZE
FORGIVE MY COMPLAINING MINISTER MARAYA THIS IS STUNNING

THE GIRL LET THINGS SLIP IN HER DELIRIUM LAST NIGHT
NO SHIP BROUGHT HER
SEPHIE OF MERIDIAN FELL FROM THE AIR AND DID NOT DIE
THIS WAS WITNESSED BY ILAHN'S SOLDIERS. SO ILAHN MUST BELIEVE HER DEAD
DOES THAT HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH THIS REJUVENATION?
YES
SHE DID IT
YOU SAW WHAT SHE DID AGAINST THE ELANAUG
I BROUGHT YOU OUT HERE TO ADVISE ME IN A DECISION
DO WE ENTICE SEPHIE TO STAY?
KEEP THE GIRL IN AKASA, HIDDEN, OR SEND A MESSENGER TO CADADOR?
KEEP HER!
IF ILAHN BELIEVES HER DEAD HE'LL NEVER LOOK FOR HER HERE!
WE SIMPLY FAIL TO NOTIFY
CHEATING ILAHN'S A DANGER
IF HIS SPIES EVER DISCOVER HER TRADE SHIPS COULD SKIP OUR PORT
DON'T FORGET HIS BLOCKADE OF SEGEN OR WHAT HE'S THREATENING TO DO TO TORBEL
LET IT FALL

ILAHN IS RUTHLESS, LIMITLESS, AND DRIVEN SEPHIE CROSSED HIM IF SHE'S DISCOVERED, WE SHARE HER PUNISHMENT
BUT IF SHE STAYS WILLINGLY, WE SHARE HER GIFT
IF SHE'S NOT FOUND, WE GAIN TIME TO STRENGTHEN ALLIANCES, USE HER TO MATCH CADADOR'S MIGHT
KEEP THE GIRL HERE AND HAPPY!
BY THE TIME ILAHN DOES SNIFF HER OUT SHE'LL BE *OURS!*
THERE'S NO BETTER CHOICE --
-- *THE GIRL IS ILAHN'S HEIR*
SHE INHERITS MERIDIAN *AND* CADADOR!
STOP!
I ASKED FOR YOUR COUNSEL BUT NONE OF YOU IS LOOKING PAST THE IMMEDIATE GAIN
YOU ARE *WRONG*
WE HAVE NO LEVERAGE WITH ILAHN!
CADADOR'S WEALTH IS A THOUSAND TIMES OURS AND A TRADE EMBARGO WOULD KILL US
WHAT WE DO, WHAT WE *MUST* DO, IS SEND A MESSENGER TO CADADOR IMMEDIATELY!
ISN'T IT BETTER TO DRAW HIS ATTENTION TO US AND ALLOW HIM TO REWARD US FOR KEEPING HIS NIECE SAFE
BY QUIETLY LETTING HIM KNOW HER LOCATION
MEANWHILE, SEPHIE WILL REMEMBER OUR KINDNESS TO HER AND ARASIA GAINS *TWO* POWERFUL ALLIES

I'D LOVE TO KEEP HER I SEE THE BENEFITS BUT I SEE A BIGGER DANGER WE CANNOT SO EASILY CATCH AND CONTROL
YOU'RE RIGHT SEND THE MESSENGER
THERE'S NO KEEPING SECRETS FROM ILAHN
TURNING THE GIRL OVER TURNS THIS TO OUR FAVOR BY THE TIME THE MESSENGER RETURNS WITH ILAHN'S INSTRUCTIONS
ILAHN WON'T SEND A MESSAGE HE WILL COME FOR HER HIMSELF
UNTIL THEN LET'S GRACIOUSLY ACCEPT EVERYTHING SEPHIE CAN DO FOR US UNTIL HE ARRIVES
SHE CREATED THIS BEAUTY
AND DID SOMETHING TO FEND OFF THE CELANAUG
I DON'T THINK SHE REALIZES THE POWER SHE WIELDS
LET'S ENCOURAGE HER TO DISCOVER HER LIMITS
SOON


Turning the day upside-down, I slept the day and woke to a surprisingly new sunset
On the surface, the daylight just STOPS at end of day!
On Meridian, the rim sunset is followed by a corona of last light that circles us from below
Seeing something so dramatic made me realize I see it often
It's like that with a lot of things. You look at them all the time and never SEE
Like uncle Ilahn

Sunset had never been more to me than a cue to go home, but that night it became a living symbol of my promise to Meridan
Iiahn of Cadador would NOT destroy my island
I'd do something good for the people of Akasia to repay them for their kindness, but then it was time for me to go home
and start a war

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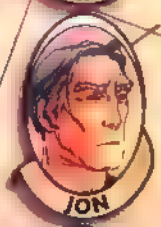
Far away...

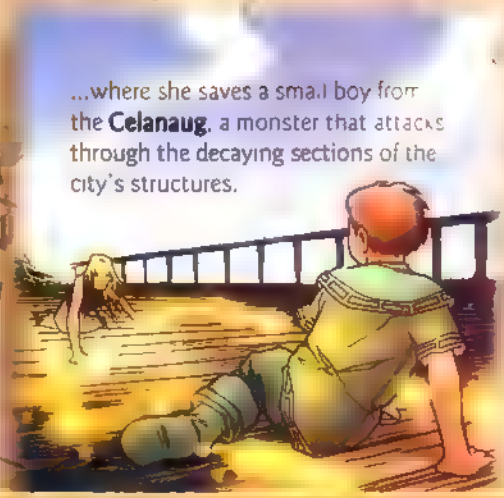


on the world of Demetria, explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

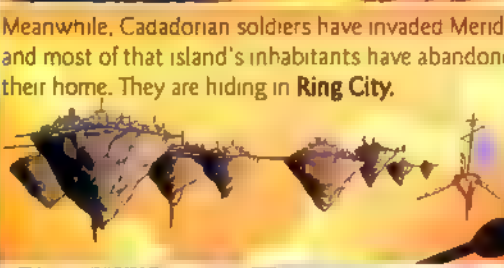
One of these islands is **Meridian**, home of shipbuilders and **Sephie**, the daughter of Minister **Turos**. Sephie's life has been spent being groomed to someday take over the ruling of Meridian.

But all that changes when a mysterious force gives Turos and **Ilahn** the Sigil, a link to power. Ilahn gains the power of decay. Sephie's father dies, his sigil transfers to her, and she finds she has the power of renewal.

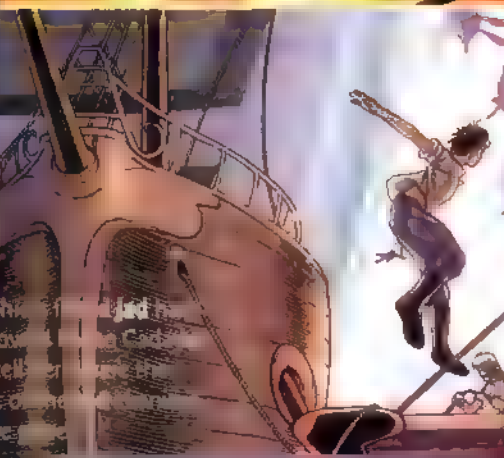
Ilahn, Sephie's uncle, whisks Sephie to **Cadador**, the island he rules, but she leaves after discovering how evil he is. His soldiers pursue her, knocking her off her ship, and she falls. Ilahn believes her dead, but she has survived and is in **Akasia**, a surface city famous for its beautiful dyes...

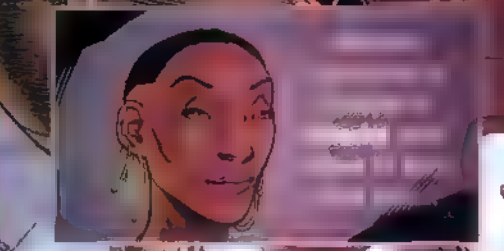


...where she saves a small boy from the **Celanaug**, a monster that attacks through the decaying sections of the city's structures.



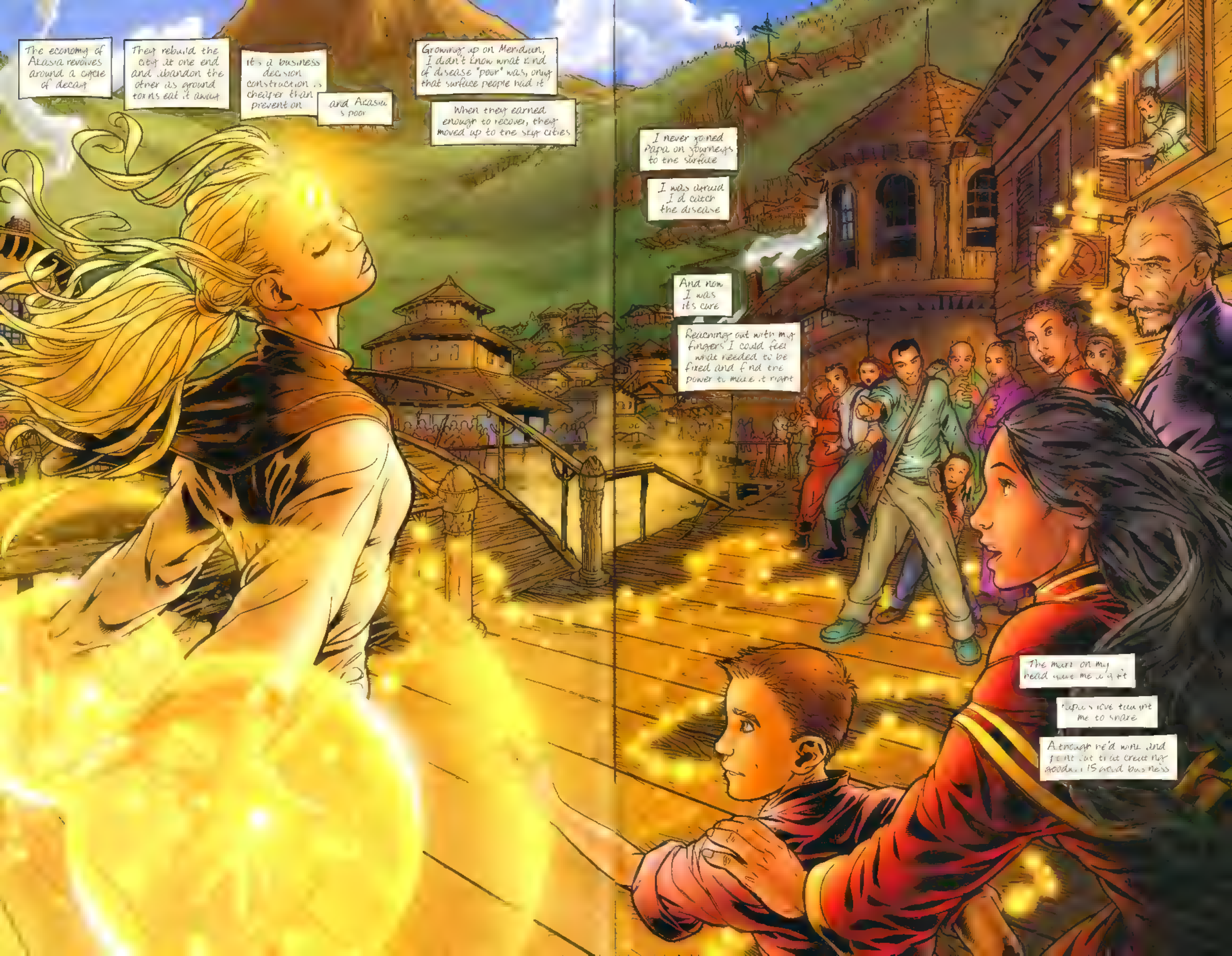
Meanwhile, Cadadorian soldiers have invaded Meridian, and most of that island's inhabitants have abandoned their home. They are hiding in **Ring City**.





...and the **Muse of Giatan**, who drops enigmatic hints about the sigils

KKKCCCH
WHA!
NO!
GET AWAY!
AAAAH
IT'S BENIGN WHATEVER IT IS

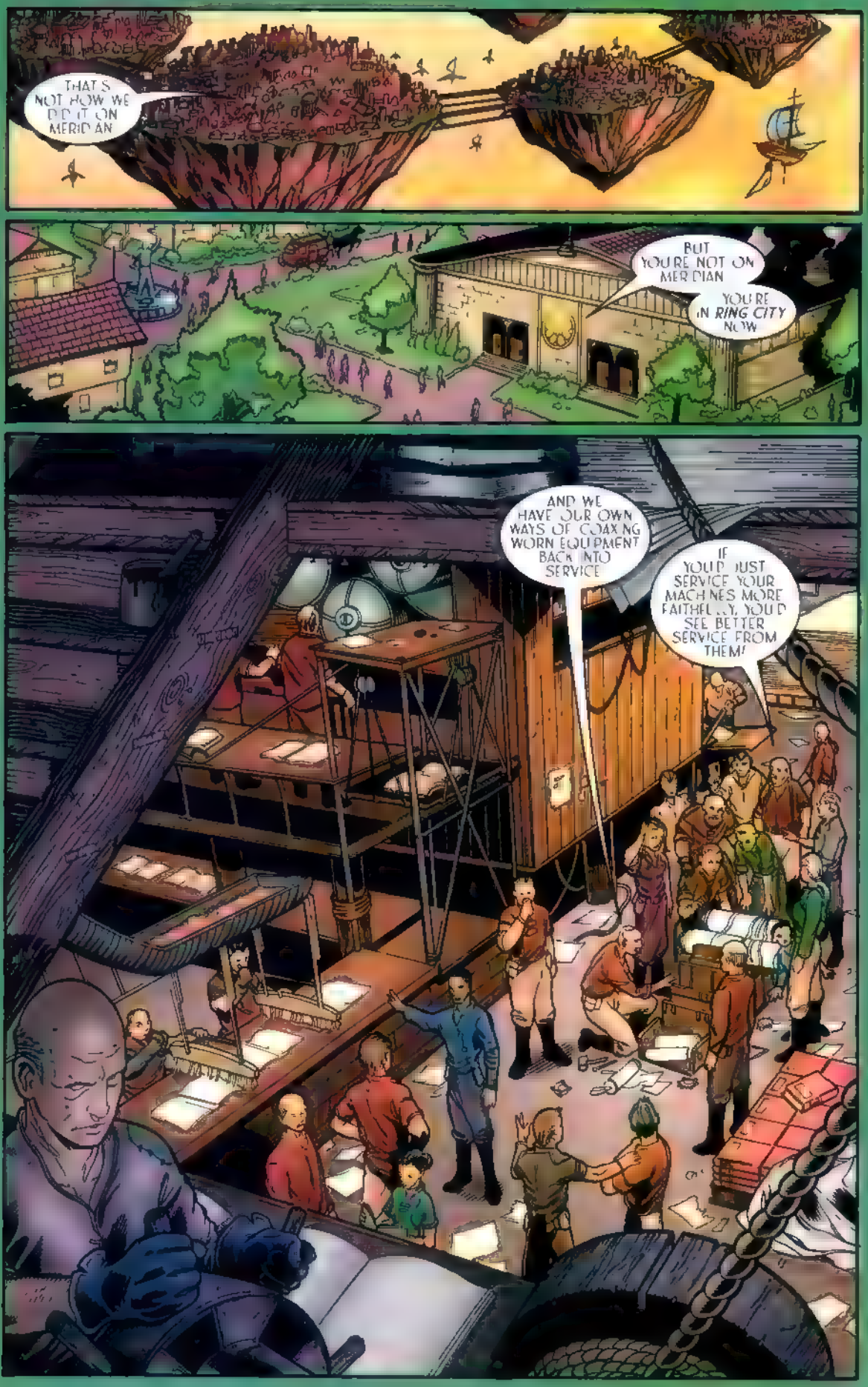

The economy of Akasia revolves around a cycle of decay
They rebuild the city at one end and abandon the other as ground toxins eat it away
It's a business decision construction is cheaper than prevention
and Akasia's poor
Growing up on Meridian, I didn't know what kind of disease "poor" was, only that surface people had it
When they earned enough to recover, they moved up to the sky cities
I never joined Papa on journeys to the surface
I was afraid I'd catch the disease
And now I was its cure
Reaching out with my fingers I could feel what needed to be fixed and find the power to make it right
The mark on my head gave me a gift
Papa's love taught me to share
Although he'd wink and point out that creating goodwill is good business

THERE! THAT MONSTER WON'T GET THROUGH THIS WOOD NOW!
SEPHIE, SUCH A MAGNIFICENT GIFT
BUT WHY AKASA?
WHY US?
BECAUSE I'M HERE AND BECAUSE YOU WERE KIND TO ME
MAYBE SOMEDAY YOU'LL BE ABLE TO DO THE SAME FOR MERIDIAN!
I DON'T GAIN ANYTHING BY NOT HELPING YOU!
ALTHOUGH I AM GETTING A LITTLE HUNGRY
MAYBE WE COULD ALL SHARE A MEAL WHEN I'M DONE?
SEPHIE!
OH! I'M SORRY THAT'S TOO MUCH...?
I DIDN'T MEAN TO BE RUDE
YOU'RE NOT

WHAT ARE YOU STANDING ON?
STANDING
AAAAH!
OH!
AAAH!
NOOO!
SEPHIE!

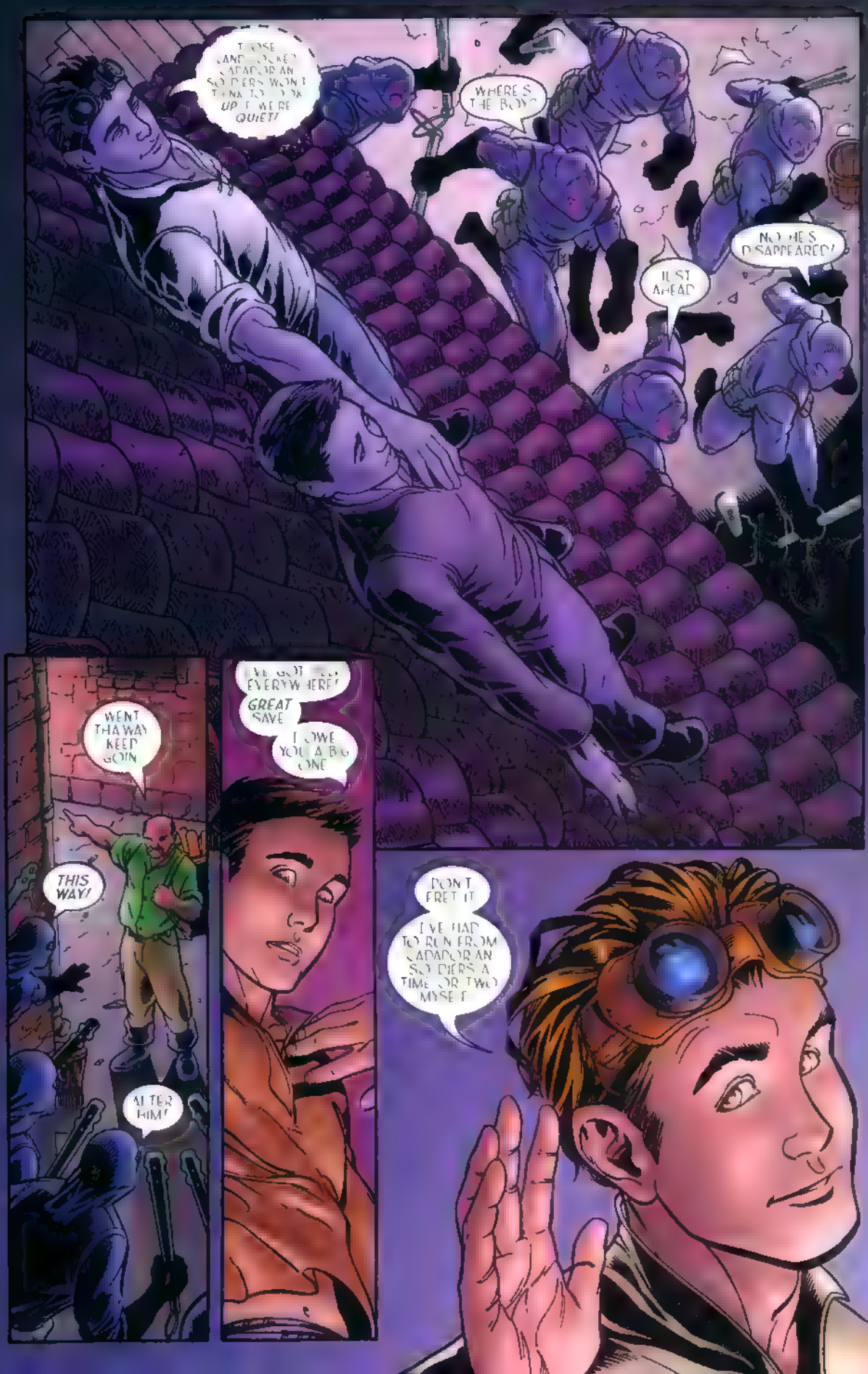
That's how I discovered my second power
I wasn't sure what had happened
ROPE
GET TOWELS!
WATER!
BASE POWDER FOR THE ACID!
except that I couldn't seem to make it happen on purpose
So I panicked
THERE SHE IS!
I knew immersion in the toxic gack was usually fatal
HURRY! WE CAN STILL SAVE HER!
so I grabbed back at hands trying to save me
until I realized I was hurting them!
EYAUGH!

They touched me and the toxins burned THEM
but I was fine
Perfectly fine
All these unusual abilities
what was I turning into?
was I really Sephie anymore?
SEPHIE
YOU ARE
A VERY UNUSUAL


THAT'S NOT HOW WE DO IT ON MERIDIAN
BUT YOU'RE NOT ON MERIDIAN
YOU'RE IN RING CITY NOW
AND WE HAVE OUR OWN WAYS OF COAXING WORN EQUIPMENT BACK INTO SERVICE
IF YOU'D JUST SERVICE YOUR MACHINES MORE FAITHFULLY, YOU'D SEE BETTER SERVICE FROM THEM!

GENTLEMEN!
GENTLEWOMEN!
SORRY TO INTERRUPT
I'M MINISTER ODWIN WELCOME TO RING CITY!
I'M SORRY WE HAD TO HUSTLE YOU ALL INTO HERE BUT YOU UNDERSTAND THE SITUATION WITH CAPADOR
TAKARTY CAN I SPEAK WITH YOU PRIVATELY?
JON, I RECOGNIZE THAT YOU AND YOURS HAVE HAD TO GIVE UP EVERYTHING TO LEAVE MERIDIAN
AND I DON'T WANT TO ADD WEIGHT TO YOUR BURDEN
BUT I'VE A RESPONSIBILITY TO MY CITYMATES TO ASK YOU THIS
WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS JON? ARE YOU GOING TO STAY IN RING CITY?
YOU'RE ALL WELCOME TO LIVE HERE WE'VE PLENTY OF ROOM - BUT WE CAN'T CONTINUE TO HIDE YOU AWAY
THERE'S BOUND TO BE A SCRAP
WE'LL PROTECT YOU FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE BUT I HAVE TO WATCH OVER OUR CITY'S SECURITY
BECAUSE CAPADORIAN SOLDIERS LURK EVERYWHERE

HUF
HUF
HUF
HUF
HUF
THERE HE IS!
LITTLE THIEF!
THANKS
SSHHHH!


THOSE LAND-LOCKED CADAVORAN SOLDIERS WON'T THINK TO LOOK UP IF WE'RE QUIET!
WHERE'S THE BOY?
NO, HE'S DISAPPEARED!
JUST AHEAD
I'VE GOT FEED EVERYWHERE!
GREAT SAVE
I OWE YOU A BIG ONE
WENT THAWAY KEEP GOIN
THIS WAY!
ALTER HIM!
DON'T FRET IT
I'VE HAD TO RUN FROM CADAVORAN SOLDIERS A TIME OR TWO MYSELF

I'M JAD TAKARTY BY THE WAY
DARIK
AND I DO OWE YOU THEY
YOOK NO BIG THING
I DID YOU A FAVOR AND NOW YOU CAN DO ME ONE
I'M FROM MERIDIAN
I'M HERE TO GET SEPHIE
SEPHIE?
THE MINISTER'S NIECE? HER?
YEAH SHE'S A SPECIAL FRIEND OF MINE THAT'S WHY THEY SENT ME
I NEED AN INSIDER HERE
SOMEONE WHO KNOWS THE STREETS OF CAPADOR
YOU INTERESTED?
UH
THAT'S OKAY IF YOU'RE NOT UP TO IT I UNDERSTAND
OH THAT'S NOT IT
YOU TWO WERE REALLY CLOSE?
SEPHIE AND ME WE'RE LIKE THIS.
THEN I HATE TO BE THE ONE TO TELL YOU THIS

SHE LEFT
SHE WAS RUNNING AWAY
KAHN SENT H.S. SOLDIERS TO GET HER BACK
THEY TRIED TO STOP HER
AND SHE
SHE DROPPED
NO!
SHE'S DEAD, JAD
DEAD?
HEY!
I'M TOO LATE
JAD!
I CAN'T--
YOU'VE GOT TO HELP ME YOU'RE TOO HEAVY
IT DOESN'T MEAN YOU HAVE TO DIE TOO JAD
JAD?
OR SEPH...

I MYSELF WAS NOT BORN ON SAPADOR
I GAINED MINISTERSHIP OF THE ISLAND THROUGH MARRIAGE
MY WIFE WAS A FRAIL WOMAN
HER MOTHER WAS MINISTER BEFORE ME
SHE BROKERED OUR MARRIAGE SHORTLY BEFORE HER OWN DEATH
MY WIFE DIED CHILDLESS I HAD GREAT HOPES THAT SEPHIE WOULD BE MY HEIR
BUT HER MISADVENTURE HAS ENSURED THAT IT WILL NEVER COME TO PASS
YOU ARE RIGHT I LACK AN HEIR
WHOEVER I NAME WILL GAIN CONTROL OF DEMETRA AFTER ME
BUT NOT WITHOUT *EARNING* IT
AS YOU WELL KNOW
THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO DO BUSINESS
AND MANY ROADS TO POWER
AND IT WOULD APPEAR THAT YOU'VE TROD THEM ALL YOUNG LADY

YOU SEE THE MARK UPON MY THROAT?
THE SIGIL WAS A GIFT TO ME FROM AN UNKNOWN SOURCE
I CAME WITH NO INSTRUCTION, NO DEMANDS FOR PAYMENT
ALTHOUGH IT'S EARLY YET TO TELL IF COST WILL ACCOMPANY ITS OBVIOUS ADVANTAGES
IT MAKES YOU IMPERVIOUS TO PAIN
OH, NO! I STILL FEEL PAIN

BUT I TRANSCEND THE SENSATION
BECAUSE I HAVE BECOME ONE WITH DESTRUCTION
AND DESTRUCTION ENDS ALL PAIN
BUT NOT ALL FEELING?
NO
NOK NOK
MINISTER ILAHN?
THERE'S A MESSENGER FROM AKASIA NEWS ABOUT...
IT'S A PERSONAL MESSAGE

FORGIVE ME, MISS TERAMU BUT DUTY INTERVENES
REESHA, PLEASE
I UNDERSTAND WE CAN RESUME OUR DISCUSSIONS AT ANY TIME MINISTER AHN
I'LL MAKE MYSELF AVAILABLE AT YOUR WHIM
MY WHIM
THAT'S VERY ACCOMMODATING
MINISTER TAHN?
MINISTER TAHN
IT'S SERMIE
SHE'S ALIVE
THE MINISTER OF AKASIA A MINOR SURFACE CITY ON THE WESTERN TRADE ROUTE
ALIVE?!
THE POWER TO BE ABLE TO FALL FROM THE SKY AND SURVIVE
GO
PREPARE A SHIP'S CREW FOR ROSS I'M GOING TO GO GET HER
BUT MY MINISTER! THERE'S MESSENGER'S WAITING! WHY TROUBLE YOURSELF?
GO.
NO. I'LL GO
I WANT TO MAKE SURE SHE'S RETURNED TO MY CARE AND TRAINING WITHOUT INCIDENT THIS TIME

SEPHIE THE PEOPLE OF AKASIA WILL ALWAYS HOLD YOU IN THEIR HEARTS FOR YOUR ACT OF KINDNESS

INSPIRED BY YOUR TREATMENT OF ME! LIKE FOR LIKE!

SEPHIE

WOULD YOU CONSIDER STAYING IN AKASIA?

THE GOOD YOU'VE DONE WILL SOON BE UNDONE BY THE TOXINS

I UNDERSTAND

YOU HAVE A CITY TO CARE FOR

I'D LOVE TO STAY HERE AND KEEP AKASIA HEALTHY

BUT I HAVE A BIGGER RESPONSIBILITY TO GO HOME AND TAKE CARE OF MY CITY

AS A FELLOW MINISTER I KNOW YOU'LL UNDERSTAND MY DUTY TO MERIDIAN

I HAVE TO LEAVE

OH YES

I

YES, I UNDERSTAND

YOU MUST DO WHAT'S BEST FOR *MERIDIAN*

AS I MUST DO WHAT IS BEST FOR AKASIA

BEFORE YOU LEAVE US, SOPHIE

THERE'S STILL A PART OF AKASIA YOU HAVEN'T SEEN

YOU'VE SEEN OUR CRAFTS. LET ME GIVE YOU A TOUR OF OUR INDUSTRY

I'D LIKE THAT!

YOURS PASSING A MESSAGE FOR ME

YES, MY MINISTER

I'M ALWAYS CURIOUS TO SEE HOW OTHER CITIES WORK

THIS IS WHERE YOUR DYES ARE PROCESSED?

YES, AND WE'RE RATHER PROUD OF THE INNOVATIVE WAY WE KEEP IT COST EFFICIENT

AAAAH!

IT'S RUN BY CHILDREN?!

There's a famous painting in Cadador

It's an image of a beautiful woman cradling a child

When you look again, you see a terrible beast, snarling and about to strike

Once you spot the beast, you can never see the beauty again without flinching

In Akasia that day I finally saw the beast

THEY'RE LEARNING THE RIGHT TO BE CITIZENS
AS MOST OF US DID BEFORE THEM
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU WOULD DO THIS!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ME?
CLANG!
NO!
YOU CAN'T LOCK ME IN HERE!
I WON'T LET YOU!
I'M SO SORRY SEPHIE
BUT MY CONCERNS ARE GREATER THAN THE WELL-BEING OF ONE CHILD
YOU ARE A RESOURCE WE NEED
YOUR GIFT WILL HELP AKASA
I HAVE TO KEEP YOU HERE
AS A FELLOW MINISTER I KNOW YOU'LL UNDERSTAND
BUT
IT'S NOT WORKING!
IT'S NOT DOING ANYTHING!
NOOO

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Far away...

on the world of Demetria, explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

One of these islands is **Meridian**, home of ship-builders and **Sephie**, the daughter of Minister **Turos**. Sephie's life has been spent being groomed to someday take over the ruling of Meridian.

But all that changes when a mysterious force gives Turos and **Ilahn**, Sephie's uncle, the Sigil, a link to power. Ilahn gains the power of decay. Sephie's father dies, his sigil transfers to her, and she finds she has the power of renewal.

Ilahn whisks Sephie to **Cadador**, the island he rules, but she leaves after discovering how evil he is. His soldiers pursue her, knocking her off her ship, and she falls.

Ilahn believes her dead, but she has survived and is in **Akasia**, a surface city famous for its beautiful dyes.

...only to be rewarded with capture when Akasia's minister decides she can't afford to let Sephie leave.
Sephie's friend Jad has followed her to Cadador to tell her where the rest of the Meridianites have gone, but is surprised by news of Sephie's death.
Reesha, watched by the Muse of Glatan, grows closer to her intended mentor, Ilahn...
...but the moment is interrupted when Ilahn learns that Sephie is still alive, and makes plans to retrieve her.

Far away on Meridian, there I was studying systems of commerce and exchange
an fairly easy to understand, because there are general rules that almost always apply
I studied furiously I wanted to be as good a minister for Meridian as my papa
but I was studying something else, too --
-- all the confusion and changes of my OWN system
SERIA
JADA
Not as easy to understand
but, still, there are rules that apply

and both kinds of systems are difficult to master
SEPHIE
WAKE UP, SEPHIE
WHA !
EEE!
SORRY SEPHIE
BUT YOU'RE NEXT IN LINE!
work!
Yesterday I was the toast of Arasia
Today, just another lawyer at the dye factory after being betrayed and shackled with chains -- a problem my power to heal couldn't fix

But now could I leave if it meant leaving all the other children in this place?
Akasia had certainly found an INNOVATIVE way to ensure profitability for their factory.
I had no idea anyplace so inhumane existed
But I was also FASCINATED by the fact that it did
Even in CADADOR, the lowliest workers are treated as people, not slaves
THIS'LL BE YOUR WORK STATION
THE OTHERS WILL INSTRUCT YOU IN YOUR DUTIES
GET TO WORK -- THE SOONER YOU START THE SOONER YOU EARN YOUR CITIZENSHIP
CITIZENSHIP HAS TO BE EARNED?
ONLY IF YOU WEREN'T BORN IN AKASIA -- IT'S FAIR
HERE TAKE THESE, AND LOOK BEHIND YOU

was this the way business really worked? Was Meridian the exception, rather than the rule?
YOU ATCH
WHEN THE [illegible] OFF THE BELT FOLD EM TEN-HIGH TO A CART
WATCH T IT'S HOT
KEEP YOUR GLOVES ON --YOU MAY BE SOME SORTA SPECIA BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU GET OUTTA YOUR SHARE A THE WORK!
Polite is polite but I was NOT a citizen-to-be of Alaska! I was the Minister of Meridian!
All that was between me and Meridian was one lousy chain!
But, just as before, nothing happened
I just can't destroy
which meant I had to be patient SOME opportunities would show up!
I hoped
And yearned

Maybe the smell is what blinded me to the very obvious solution
My power didn't affect the iron shackles
but the shackles were attached to the wood
and I'd healed all the wood in Atlasia. My power worked on the WOOD!
so if only
I could bring a miracle to
then I could
I WOULD be
KRANG! KRAK!

FREE!
Although I was still burdened by a little reminder
nothing a few snip's knots wouldn't bind
into a trouble to be unknotted later
My immediate problem was how to take as many children as possible with me
especially since my little escape hadn't inspired open rebellion
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

I'M LEAVING!
AND I WANT YOU ALL TO LEAVE WITH ME!
YOU'RE SLAVES HERE COME WITH ME TO MERIDIAN!
NO?
BUT -- WHY?
THERE'S MONSTERS OUTSIDE!
THEY FEED US HERE, AND WE HAVE A SAFE PLACE TO LIVE UNTIL WE BECOME CITIZENS
THAT'S MORE THAN MOST OF US HAD BEFORE
REALLY?
WELL, I HAVE A PLACE FOR YOU TO LIVE TOO, AND WHEN I GET BACK UP THERE I'LL BE BACK TO FIX THIS PLACE UP OR TAKE YOU THERE!
I PROMISE -
YOU!
NO MORE TALKING!
I WON'T FORGET YOU!

AKASIA
WHAT A WRETCHED LITTLE CITY
WELCOME TO AKASIA MINISTER CAHN
I TRUST THINGS IN CADADOR ARE WELL?
MADAME MINISTER MIGHT I COMPLIMENT YOU ON YOUR GOOD JUDGMENT IN SENDING A MESSAGE TO ME SO QUICKLY
SIMPLE COURTESY I TRY TO MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONS WITH AKASIAS TRADING PARTNERS
HMPFH
PARTNERS MORE PROPERLY BENEFACTORS
NOW TAKE ME TO MY NIECE IMMEDIATELY!

WE'RE PROUD TO HAVE YOU YOURSELF COME TO AKASIA MINSTER ILAHN
IT'S RARE TO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW OFF OUR COLORS TO SUCH AN IMPORTANT GUEST
AND YOU NEEDN'T WAIT FOR A CARRIAGE THERE ISN'T ONE
WE DON'T USE FLOATING SEATS LIKE YOU SKY CITY PEOPLE. OUR OWN LEGS WORK WELL ENOUGH
PLEASE COME ALONG
WALK?
LIKE A PEASANT?
BOSCAU, WE MUST GET SEPHIE AND RETURN TO CIVILIZATION AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE
IT'S NOT FAR!

THIS HAS GONE FAR ENOUGH
HIDING US FROM THE CADADORIAN SOLDIERS IS PUTTING TOO MUCH STRAIN ON THE PEOPLE OF RING CITY
SO NOW WE HAVE TO MAKE A CHOICE
THE VOTE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE UNANIMOUS EACH ONE OF US MUST BE GUIDED BY HIS OR HER OWN MORAL TOPESTONE
THOSE OF US WHO WANT TO REMAIN HERE IN RING CITY WILL HAVE TO GIVE UP THEIR TIES TO MERIDIAN AND ASSIMILATE INTO THE CITY
THOSE WHO WANT TO RETAIN OUR SEPARATE ALLEGIANCE WILL HAVE TO MOVE ON TO NEW TERRITORY
JON?
YES HASTAN?

THE CHOICE MIGHT NOT BE OURS - THERE'S CADADORS HEADED OUR WAY!
KEEP CALM
WE'RE IN THE MINISTRY THEY WON'T VIOLATE ITS DOORS WITHOUT CAUSE
MIRA!
MOVE AWAY
THEY SEEM TO FEEL THEY HAVE CAUSE

KRRAK

WHUMP

AFTER WHAT YOU DID TO OUR FORCES ON MERIDIAN

IT'LL BE A PLEASURE TO PEN YOU RUSTICS AND SEND YOU BACK IN CHAINS!

WHAKK

WHICH WOULD MEAN CAPTURING US FIRST!

KREK

REMEMBER WE ESCAPED YOU ON MERIDIAN!

WHUMP

APTURE

FEABLE, ARE THEY GOING TO PUT US IN CAGES?

NO NO NO

KEEP DOWN CHILDREN

I KNOW WE HAVEN'T KNOWN EACH OTHER LONG SAGO BUT HANG ON TIGHT!

WHAKK

YOU STAY AWAY FROM THEM!
CLANGK
KREKAKK
FLOOMP
YOU BROUGHT THIS ON YOURSELF
KLUMPF
...IT'S BAD LUCK TO BREAK FAITH WITH ANOTHER CITY'S MINISTRY!
WHUDD

WHEW!
THOUGHT IT LOOKED LIKE YOU MERIDANITES COULD USE A LITTLE HELP FROM US, JON
STRANGE WAY OF STAYING NEUTRAL YOU HAVE THERE ODWIN
I'M OVERWHELMED
YOU KNOW LAHN WILL TAKE IT OUT ON RING CITY
THAT'S PROBABLY TRUE
BUT SOMETIMES YOU JUST HAVE TO DO THE RIGHT THING AND DAMN THE CONSEQUENCES
THERE'S NO MATTER OF CHOICE LEFT NOW, MIRA WE HAVE TO MOVE ON
TRUE, AND IF WE LEAVE SOON, WE CAN TAKE THE BLAME WITH US

LEFT CADADOR?
LOROSI!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN HE'S LEFT CADADOR?
MINISTER ILAHN HAS BEEN CALLED AWAY ON IMPORTANT BUSINESS I'M AFRAID I CANNOT DIVULGE ITS NATURE
LOROSI, I THOUGHT WE TWO HAD AN UNDERSTANDING
WE DO.
I UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU WANT FROM THE MINISTER AND I CANNOT HELP PROVIDE IT IF HE'S NOT HERE
GOOD DAY, M'LADY
HUH?
HIS FUTURE IS NO LONGER AS SECURE AS HE IMAGINES

THE FUTURE IS NEVER A SECURE THING
HMM?
OLD WOMAN
DID YOU SAY SOMETHING TO ME?
I COULD SAY SOMETHING OF WHAT THE EYES HAVE SEEN
BUT IT WOULD REQUIRE ONE TO LISTEN
I'M LISTENING
SO TELL ME
WHAT HAVE THOSE UNUSUAL OLD EYES SEEN?
ONCE DID A WOMAN CIRCLE THE WORLD FOR POWER
ONCE WAS A DOOR OPENED TO HER
ONCE WAS IT CLOSED
SOON IT WILL OPEN AGAIN
OFFERING BOTH POWER AND PRICE

OH POOR SEPHIE
FALLING ALL ALONE
I HOPE YOUR END WAS QUICK AND PAINLESS
AND I WISH I'D HAD THE CHANCE TO TELL YOU
BUT I DIDN'T
AND NOW I HAVE TO TELL THE OTHERS YOU'RE NEVER COMING HOME

Home!
Freedom was SO close
To get away I planned to commit my first crime and steal one of Arasia's ships
I told myself that this was justified and that I'd send a new ship back from Meridian in exchange
But it still didn't feel right
Neither did seeing a CADADORIAN ship in Arasia's port!
Did Uncle Iahn send it?
Did he know I was there?

Would he ever know if I died right here?
Not that I would, even with the heavy chain dragging me down I had my strange power to save me
This force it could heal, it could PUSH
but it wouldn't BREAK
Or was that just me that couldn't or wouldn't destroy?
Maybe it wasn't the power at all

So there I was alive free and on my way
Hahn's soldiers, Maraura's guards --
-- no one could stop me
I wasn't going back Not to Akasa's dye factory not to Hahn's estate
and maybe

not even to Meridian

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But all that changes when a mysterious force gives Turos and **Ilahn**, Sephie's uncle, the sigil, a link to power. Ilahn gains the power of decay. Sephie's father dies, his sigil transfers to her, and she finds she has the power of renewal.

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Ilahn believes her dead, but she has survived and is in **Akasia**, a surface city famous for its beautiful dyes...

The Celanaur evolved in the blighted regions surrounding Arasia. It's a carnivorous monster that thrives in the toxic runoff that surrounds the city.
Every so often, an Arasian is lost to a Celanaur.
I'd learned to respect its power and size during my detour in Arasia.
so I could understand why children crowned in the dye factories would choose to stay prisoners and avoid a possible encounter.
I couldn't even THINK about how afraid I was.
But NOTHING was going to get between me and Meridian.
which meant I had to keep one step ahead of the monster.

Except there wasn't just ONE Celanawg

That's what I got for running away from my troubles

MORE

Suddenly the power to HEAL didn't seem very powerful

Or useful

Papa never let me back away from a problem
"The best way to meet it is head on" he'd say
"Face it down"
"make it a crisis solved and forgotten BEFORE it turns into a monster"
I doubt he ever envisioned a problem THIS monstrous, though

Or that I'd be racing for my life--
--on the SURFACE!--
--weighted down by the symbol of my capture
2
When I boldly put to use
once naif certain that any damage that made it through my makeshift armor could be healed by my power
GRAAAUREEEEECH
but the links were made of tougher stuff than the Cetanaug
Although
maybe I wasn't
I needed a way to escape before fear stopped me dead
Whatever it was I'd done to make myself hover over the totems before
I reached inside and tried to find it now

THIS CH T CHAT S ALL VERY CHARMING MIN STER MARAYA
BUT LET S DISPENSE W TH THE UNNECESSARY NICETIES
YOU SAID YOU HAVE MY NIECE HERE N AKASIA
SO FAR YOU HAVE FAILED TO PRODUCE HER
THERE S BEEN A SLIGHT DELAY N
WE HAVEN T BEEN
I DID WHAT I THOUGHT BEST BUT
OH I CAN T BE
MINISTER AHN
WE VE LOST HER
LOST

OH, I UNDERSTAND!
YOU FOUND YOURSELF WITH A SURFEIT OF TRADE GOODS AND NEEDED TO DRAW DOWN A SHIP!
SO YOU TOOK ADVANTAGE OF AN OLD MAN'S BEREAVEMENT TO OFFER HIM FALSE HOPE!
NO, I DID NOT! SEPHIE *WAS* HERE AND SHE *WAS* BEING HELD AT THE FACTORY UNTIL SHE TOOK IT UPON HERSELF TO HEAD OUT INTO THE BLIGHTED LANDS *ALONE!*
BUT YOU *WANT* TO *SEE* ME TAKE ADVANTAGE? THEN JUST *WATCH* WHAT I'LL MAKE LADADOR PAY FOR YOUR SAFE RETURN!
YOU'RE HOLDING *ME* HOSTAGE
THEN IT APPEARS I'VE MADE AN ERROR IN BRINGING ONLY A SMALL GUARD STAFF TO ACCOMPANY ME
BUT PERHAPS MY MISSTEP
IS MERELY *FATE* IN DISGUISE

PRESENT HAS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ME TO *TEACH* YOU WHAT IT MEANS TO CROSS CAPADOR

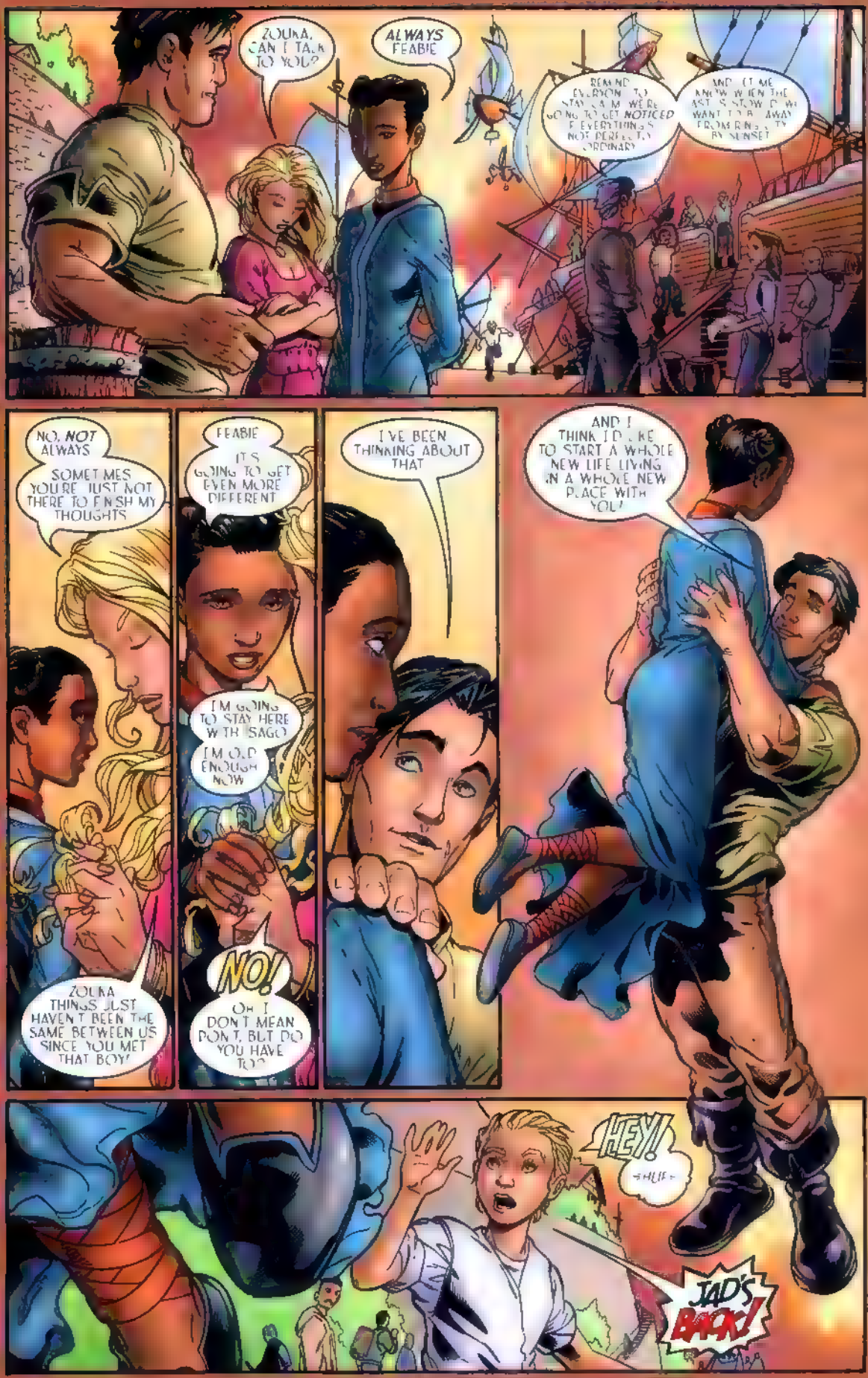
KRAKA

KRAKOOM

Being from the sky cities and not the surface, I wasn't familiar with explosions
KATHOOM
HUH?
The phenomenon distracted me long enough
WHAT WAS THAT?
for my curiosity to do what my questing couldn't
and give me the sky
although I WAS still anchored to reality

But the fear had faded. I'd gained more than just flight
like with my healings, I could FEEL the forces now
I could control what I was doing and how to make it work!
Which left me another mystery to ponder
along with the question of WHAT was going on down in Akasia
It looked like a big battle of some kind
Had my escape led to revolt after all?
I'd find out AFTER I found a way to rid myself of unwanted pests
Now that my confidence had returned

I was certain I'd be back to Meridian and my friends soon!
HEY!
THERE HE IS!
PARDON ME!

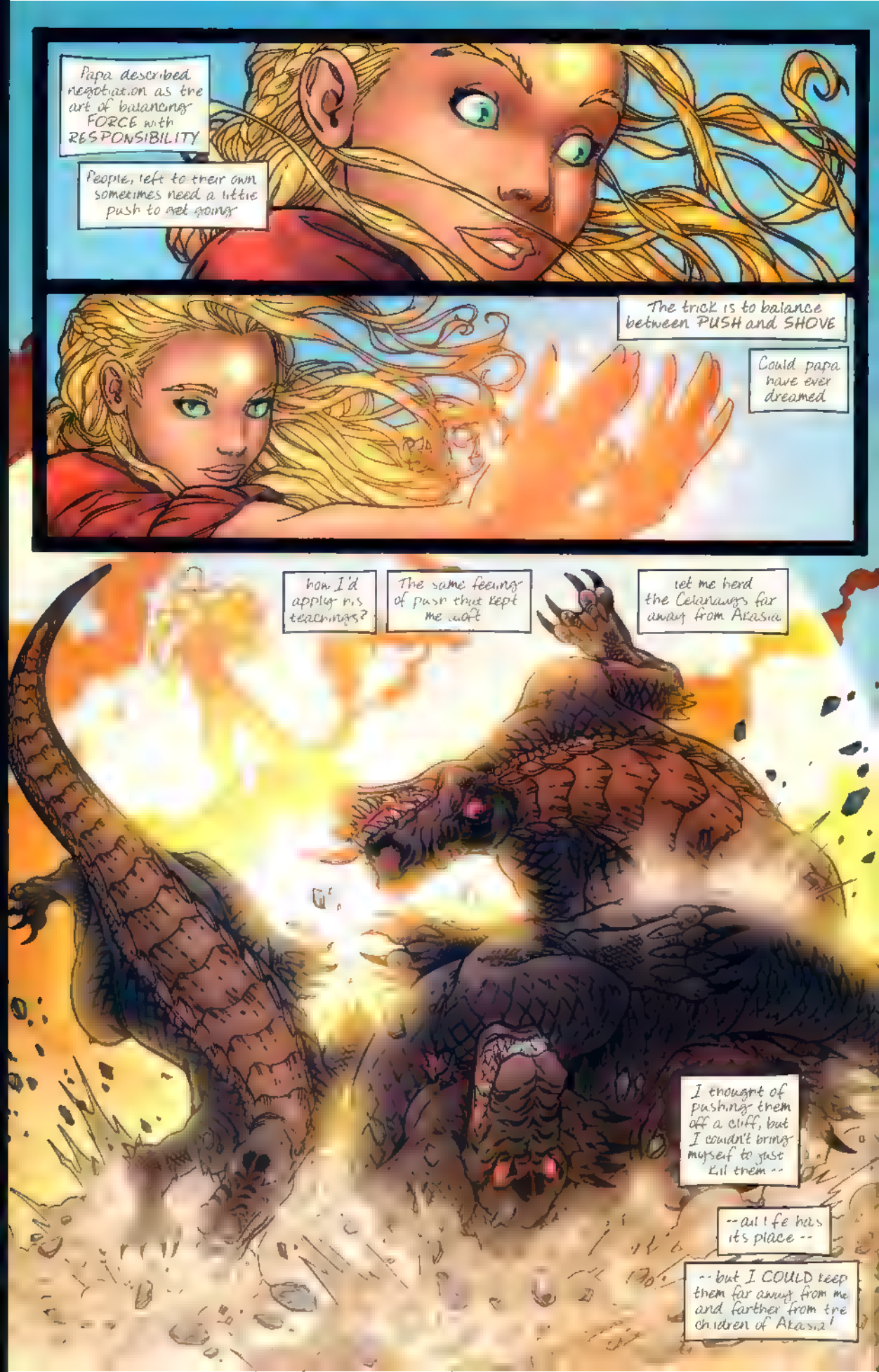

ZOUKA, CAN I TALK TO YOU?
ALWAYS FEABIE
REMIND EVERYONE TO STAY CALM WE'RE GOING TO GET NOTICED IF EVERYTHING'S NOT PERFECTLY ORDINARY
AND LET ME KNOW WHEN THE LAST STOW'D WANT TO BE AWAY FROM RING BY SUNSET
NO, NOT ALWAYS
SOMETIMES YOU'RE JUST NOT THERE TO FINISH MY THOUGHTS
ZOUKA THINGS JUST HAVEN'T BEEN THE SAME BETWEEN US SINCE YOU MET THAT BOY!
FEABIE
IT'S GOING TO GET EVEN MORE DIFFERENT
I'M GOING TO STAY HERE WITH SAGO
I'M OLD ENOUGH NOW
NO!
OH I DON'T MEAN DON'T, BUT DO YOU HAVE TO?
I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT THAT
AND I THINK I'D LIKE TO START A WHOLE NEW LIFE LIVING IN A WHOLE NEW PLACE WITH YOU!
HEY!
JAD'S BACK!

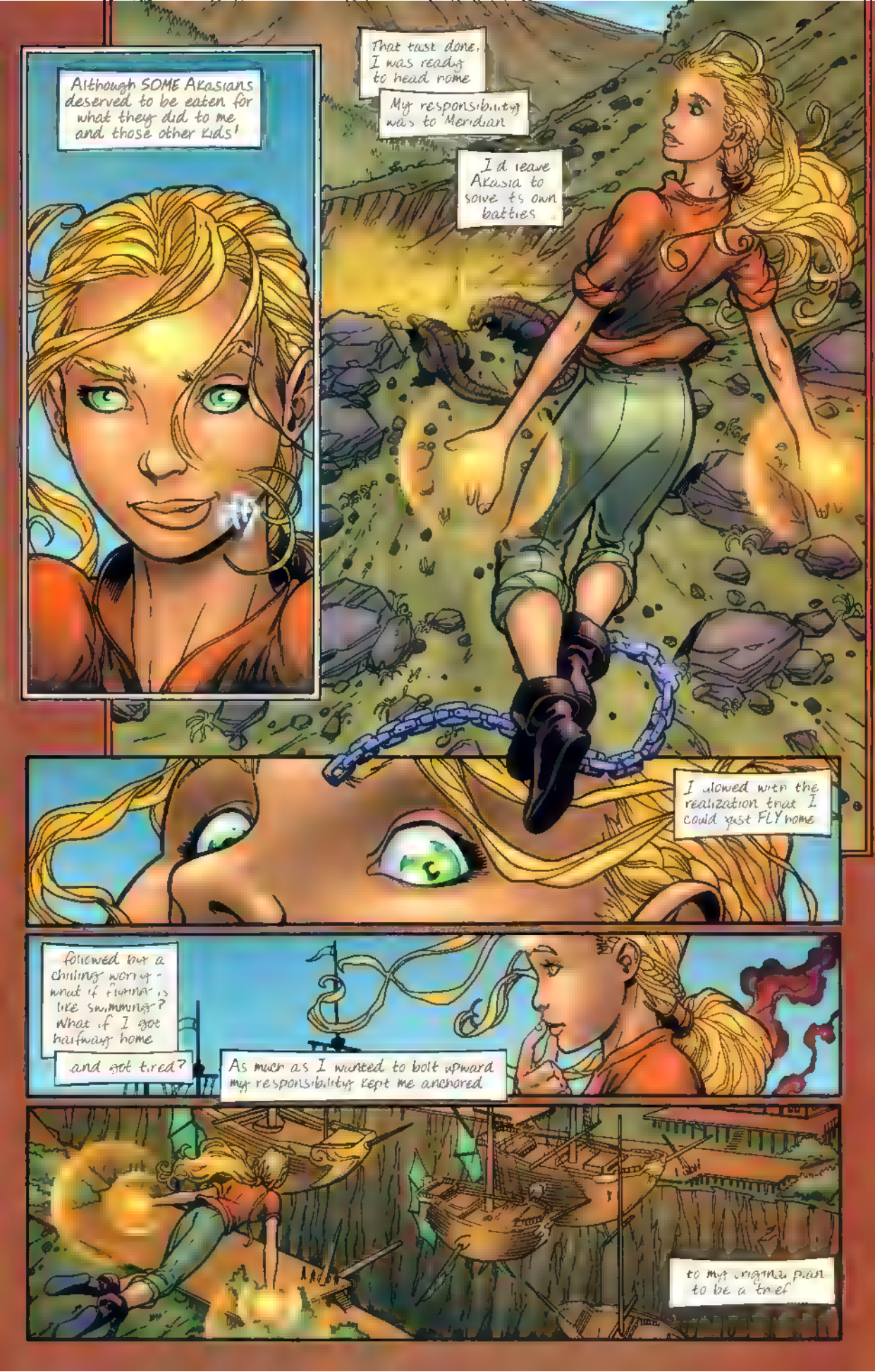
JAD?
WHERE LOWE?
ROUND THE RING A WAYS!
FOLLOW ME!
JAD!
HI, JAD!
FEABE
ZOUKA
AND WHY ARE YOU SO TIRED?
OH! THE LONG VOYAGE FROM CADADOR WITH JUST YOU AND SEPHIE
WHERE'S SHE?
SEPHIE'S NOT COMING WITH US
JUST BECAUSE WE LEFT MERIDIANS
HUH!
CADADOR'S SPOILED THAT GIR
NO, FEABIE, I MEAN NOT EVER COMING BACK
SHE'S
SHE'S
DEAD
NOOO!

OH, JAD!
THAT'S SO AWFUL!
WHAT HAPPENED?
SHE'S FROM MERIDAN YET
SHE FELL FROM A SHIP FEAB
SHE WAS COMING BACK TO US AND SHE FELL
FEABIE WITHOUT SEPHIE THERE'S NO REASON NOW NOT TO JUST MOVE ON
WE'RE ALL STARTING OVER JAD WE'RE HEADING FOR A BRAND NEW ISLAND WE CAN TAME AND MAKE INTO OUR NEW HOME
SO YOU CRY AT YOU NEED TO YOU'RE STRONG AND YOU'LL SURVIVE THIS
WE'LL SURVIVE THIS

MARAYA, PUT ASIDE YOUR PRIDE AND *LISTEN*
YOU'LL NEVER BE MORE THAN A MINOR MINISTER OF A *FAILING* SURFACE CITY IF YOU DON'T LEARN FROM YOUR MISTAKES
FOR INSTANCE, POWER *CAN* BE TAKEN BY FORCE, BUT YOU MUST BE CERTAIN YOU *DO* HAVE THE POSITION OF GREATER RELATIVE STRENGTH
IF YOU DO NOT YOU ASSURE YOUR OWN DESTRUCTION
AAAH!
I'M DISAPPOINTED IN YOU, MARAYA. YOU'D BEEN SURPRISINGLY SUCCESSFUL IN YOUR MANAGEMENT OF AKASA
I'D EVEN HAD MY EYE ON YOU

I'D CONSIDERED YOU SOMEONE TO WATCH CLOSELY. THE RARE COMBINATION OF INTELLECT AND PERSONAL DYNAMISM
A POSSIBLE STUDENT IN FACT
YOUR CURRENT ACTIONS HOWEVER BELIE THE INTELLIGENCE I'D ASSUMED OF YOU
NOW I DON'T THINK I CARE TO HELP YOU AT ALL
OH NO
NO
NO!
YES
YOU GAMBLED WITH YOUR CITY'S PROSPECTS
NOW AKASHA WILL HAVE TO PAY THE PRICE OF BAD BUSINESS


Papa described negotiation as the art of balancing FORCE with RESPONSIBILITY
People, left to their own sometimes need a little push to get going
The trick is to balance between PUSH and SHOVE
Could papa have ever dreamed
how I'd apply his teachings?
The same feeling of push that kept me aloft
let me herd the Celanawgs far away from Akasia
I thought of pushing them off a cliff, but I couldn't bring myself to just kill them --
--all life has its place --
-- but I COULD keep them far away from me and farther from the children of Akasia!


That task done, I was ready to head home
My responsibility was to Meridian
I'd leave Akasia to solve its own battles
Although SOME Akasians deserved to be eaten for what they did to me and those other kids!
I glowed with the realization that I could just FLY home
followed by a chilling worry - what if flying is like swimming? What if I got halfway home
and got tired?
As much as I wanted to bolt upward my responsibility kept me anchored
to my original post to be a thief

not knowing that I wasn't going to be able to carry it out

LET'S SEE HOW YOU ACCOMPLISH TRADE WITHOUT SHIPS!

NOO!
Uncle Ilahn hadn't sent a ship after me
he'd come himself
And I wasn't the only one of us two to discover there was MORE power to the sigil
Those lovely ships, months of our hard labor destroyed in seconds!
Tears kept me from seeing the worst of the destruction
Being jailed, nearly smothered, almost eaten, and now watching Uncle Ilahn destroy my escape
it was all just too much
I knew I wasn't strong enough to go directly against Ilahn yet
I needed help
And it wouldn't be coming from Arasia
Not now
And it wasn't waiting in Meridian
So I'd just have to find help somewhere else

The CrossGen Universe created by Mark Alessi & Gina M. Villa
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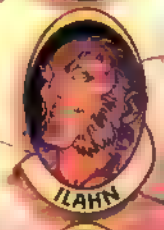
MERIDIAN
McNIVEN
ENSIGN
MO!

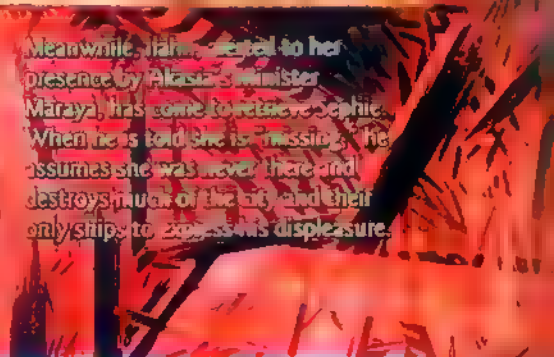
Far away on the world of Demetria, explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

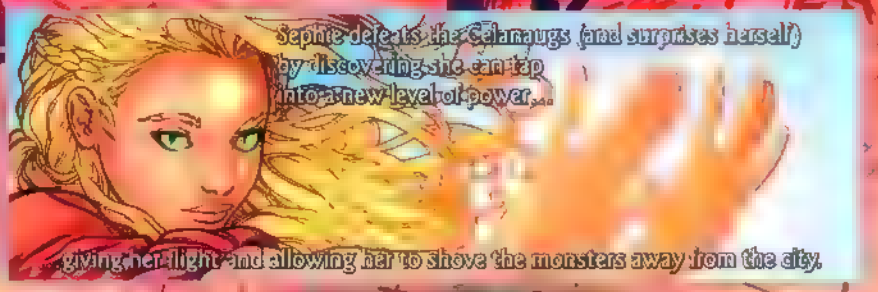
One of these islands is **Meridian**, home of ship-builders and **Sephie**, the daughter of Minister **Turos**. Sephie's life has been spent being groomed to someday take over the ruling of Meridian.

But all that changes when a mysterious force gives Turos and **Ilahn**, Sephie's uncle, the sigil, a link to power. Ilahn gains the power of decay. Sephie's father dies, his sigil transfers to her, and she finds she has the power of renewal.

Ilahn whisks Sephie to **Cadador**, the island he rules, but she leaves after discovering how evil he is. His soldiers pursue her, knocking her off her ship, and she falls. Ilahn believes her dead, but she has survived and is taken to **Akasia**, a surface city famous for its beautiful dyes. There Sephie is captured and forced to work with the other children in the dye factories until she figures out how she can use her power to escape.




Meanwhile, Ilahn, alerted to her presence by Akasia's minister Maraya, has come to retrieve Sephie. When he is told she is missing, he assumes she was never there and destroys much of the city, and their only ship, to express his displeasure.


Sephie defeats the Celanaugs (and surprises herself) by discovering she can tap into a new level of power...
...giving her flight and allowing her to shove the monsters away from the city.

Far away in Ring City, Jad arrives with the sad news of Sephie's death as the Meridianites embark on their voyage to a new, uninhabited island. Reabel is eager to comfort Jad in his grief.

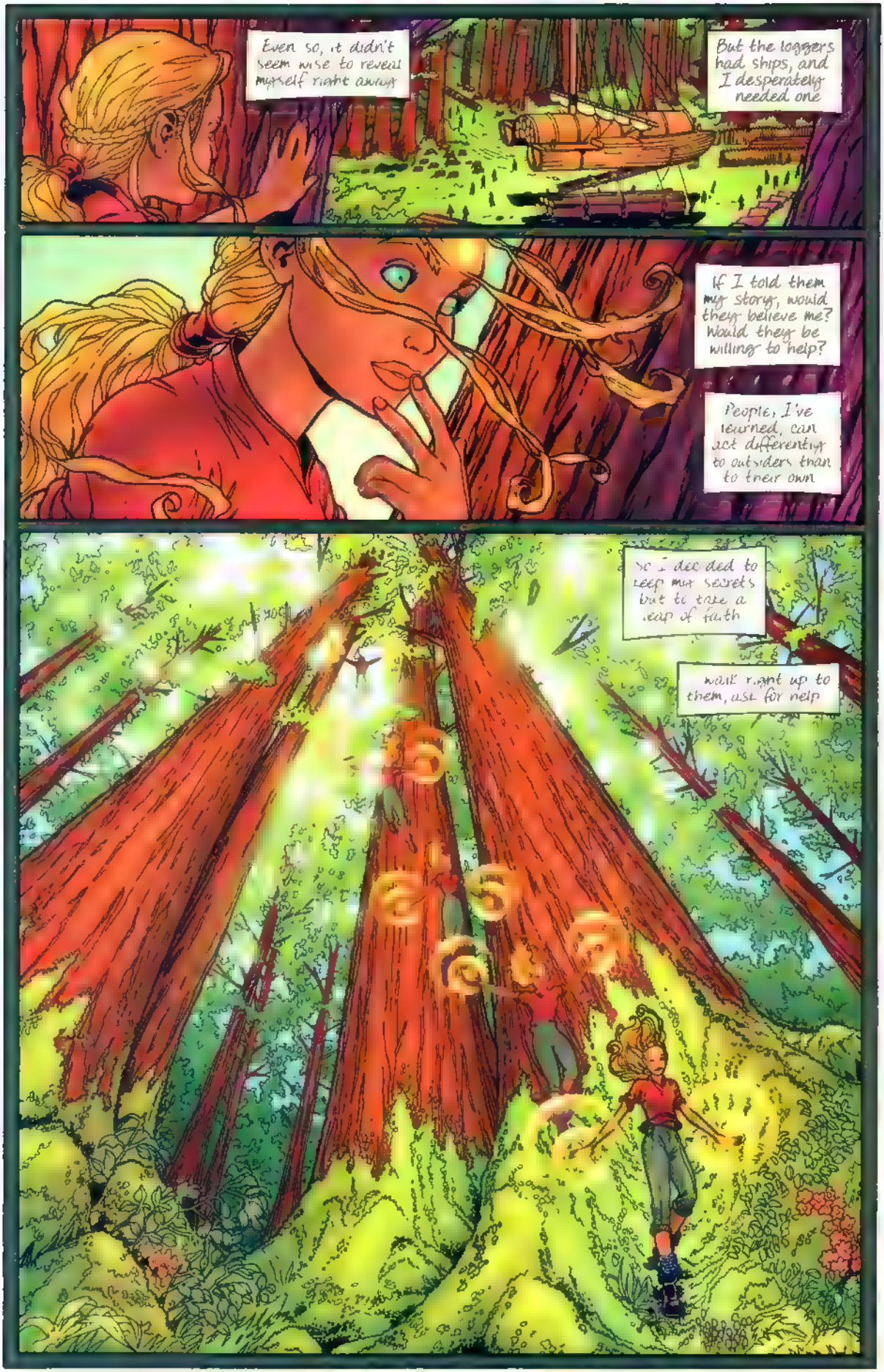
We're shipbuilders, the people of Meridian. We take the raw buoyant timber and fashion it into starships.
We view our work as more than just labor -- doing it well is a source of pride
ZRRRRPPT
Since we focus on the finished work -- the ships -- it's easy to forget that the wood had a former life as trees
SKREEEK
Or that those trees are felled by people who appear to see their labor as a source of pride
KREK
I'd met the merchants who delivered the timber, of course
but I'd never really thought about where the wood came from

until I found myself observing an entire SOCIETY of loungers

A city of sorts but a transient one

How strange not to be bound to one island or province but they appeared to be a thriving community

And it reminded me so much of home. There was noise! Busy, not angry, sounds and not the broken-spirit silence of Akasia


Even so, it didn't seem wise to reveal myself right away
But the loggers had ships, and I desperately needed one
If I told them my story, would they believe me? Would they be willing to help?
People, I've learned, can act differently to outsiders than to their own
So I decided to keep my secrets but to take a leap of faith
walk right up to them, ask for help

and find out what their reaction would be
Aaal HULLO?
EH?
WHO?
AKASIA?
GOTTA BE THAT'S THEIR COLORS
ANOTHER ONE?
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
OH YOU POOR THING!
ARE YOU HURT?
DO YOU NEED ANYTHING? FOOD? WATER?
THANK YOU BUT
COME WE'LL GET YOU SOMETHING TO EAT
I was pleased that they seemed so caring.
but the people of Akasia had also been caring

WHAT I COULD USE MOST IS A BLACKSMITH'S HELP W TH *THIS*
SO YOU *DID* ESCAPE THE FACTORIES
WE SEE ONE A YOU EVERY NOW N' THEN
HOW LONG DID YOU LAST?
YOU'RE NOT PALE ENOUGH TO BE A LONG TIMER
QUIT QUIZZIN THE KID, HONDELL
SHE'S CARRYING ENOUGH OF AN EXTRA LOAD
SHE DOESN'T NEED YOUR CURIOSITY PILED ON TOP
COTSON HERE THEY DUMPED HIM IN THE TOXIC SWAMP AS A YOUNGSTER
ONLY HIS HEAD, THAT IS
REALLY?
SURE!
GAVE ME THE BRAINS *HONDELL* DOESN'T HAVE
BUT HE'S JUST PULLING YOUR CHAIN MISS ?
SEPHIE
SEPHIE, LET ME SHOW YOU WHERE YOU CAN HAVE THAT FINE JEWELRY REMOVED

SETHUN, SEPHIE HERE NEEDS HER LEG CHOPPED OFF
WHAT?
LEG RONS WASN'T I SPECIFIC ENOUGH?
STEP RIGHT UP!
I WAS HOPING TO KEEP THE LEG
WELL SEE WHAT WE CAN DO
SETHUN'S BLIND, YOU KNOW
BLIND, BOWLEGGED AND DRUNK
IT'LL ONLY HURT A LITTLE
THAT'S VERY REASSURING
DON'T WORRY
IF THESE GUYS HURT YOU DOING A SIMPLE JOB LIKE BREAKING THAT SHACKLE
I'LL KILL 'EM
AAAAAH YOU DON'T REALLY MEAN THAT?

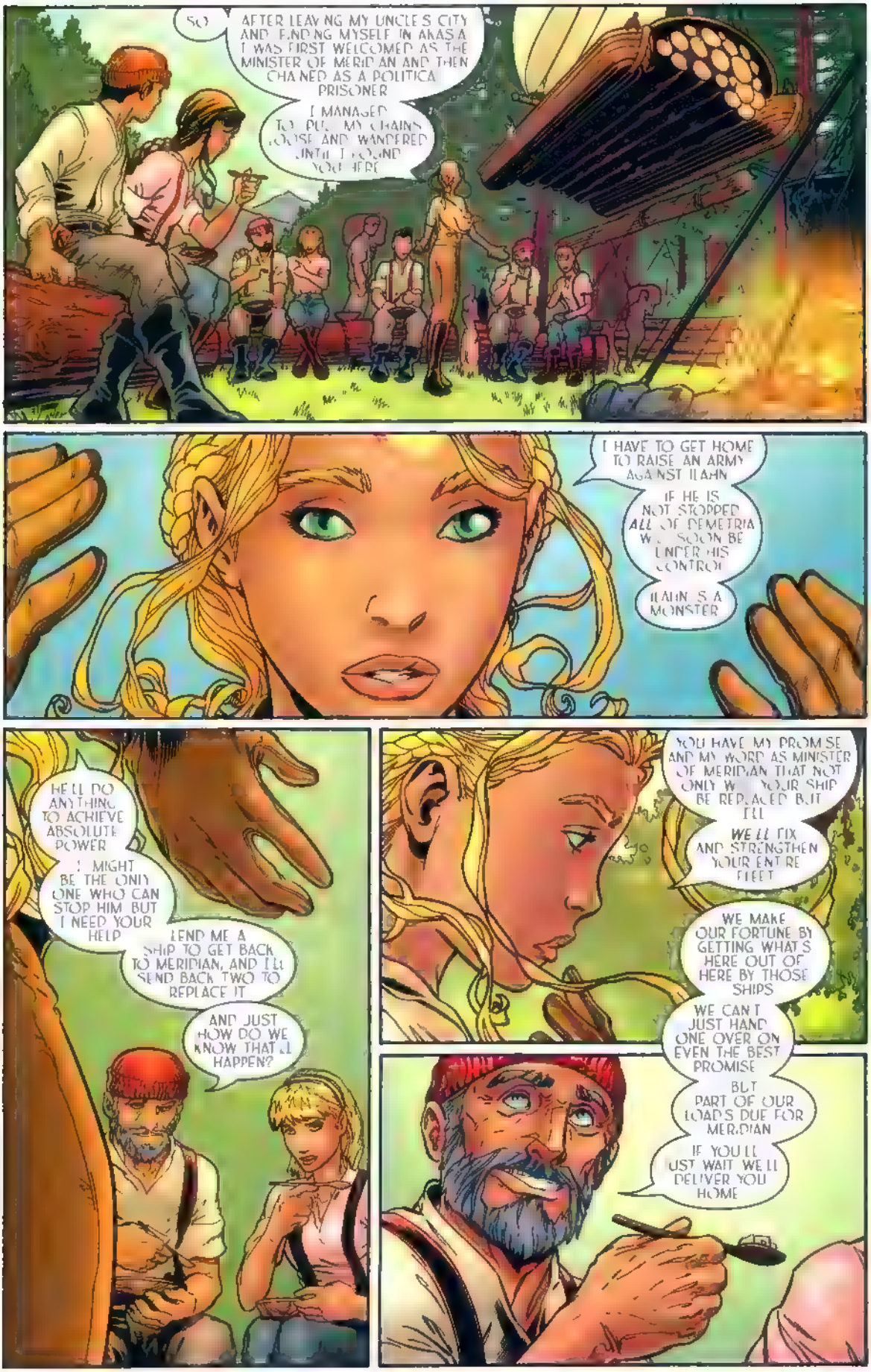
SURE I DO
BLIND OR NOT IF SETHUN'S AIM IS THAT BAD DEATH'S THE ONLY THING FOR HIM
KRAKKK
SAVED AGAIN, SETHUN!
YOU'LL HAVE TO FORGIVE OUR BAD JOKES, SEPHIE
WE DON'T GET OUT MUCH, AND THE TREES HAVE HEARD ALL OUR BEST ONES ALREADY
SO HOW'D YOU MAKE IT ACROSS THE BLIGHTED AREA ALONE?
OH, I JUST KICKED ONE CELANAUG IN THE FACE WITH *THIS*, SHOVED THE REST OUT OF MY WAY AND FLEW ON OVER THE RIDGELINE!
FUNNY!
YOU'LL FIT IN HERE JUST FINE, SEPH!
ALTHOUGH HUMOR'S BEST IF YOU KEEP IT *BELIEVABLE*

WHAT A WASTED VOYAGE!
BOSCALI TAKE NOTE ! I AM NEVER AGAIN SETTING FOOT ON ARASIA
HAVE ALL TRADE SHIPS REROUTED AND ALL CONTRACTS RESCINDED!
SIR
SURFACE CITY THOUGHT SHE COULD FOOL THE MINISTER OF CADAPOR INTO SUPPLYING HER PETTY TRANSPORTATIONAL NEEDS!
SIR?
THEY'LL BE BANKRUPT WITHIN THE MONTH.
WHAT IS IT, OROSI?
VISITORS
WHAT IS ONE TINY SURFACE CITY TO THE MINISTER OF MIGHTY CADAPOR?
LET IT FALL FROM YOUR THOUGHTS

YOU HAVE NO NEED TO WASTE YOUR WRATH ON IT
WELL MUSE?
AFTER YOUR DISAPPEARANCE, I ASSUMED YOU'D ABANDONED ME
I WAS DISAPPOINTED
I HAVE MY OWN WAYS AND MY OWN PATH
PUT ASIDE YOUR NEEDLESS ANGER, MINISTER OF CAPADOR. I HAVE SOMEONE IT WOULD WELL SERVE YOU TO MEET
MISS TERAMU AND I HAVE ALREADY BECOME ACQUAINTED
NICE TO HAVE YOU HOME AGAIN MINISTER
HEED ME FOOLISH MAN
SHE IS NOT THE ONE
THE EYES HAVE GAZED ON THE LINE OF YOUR FOLLOWING YOUR FATE AND YOUR FUTURE
YOU CONTROL MUCH OF THIS WORLD
THE TIME HAS COME TO TAKE THE REST
AS THESE INTRODUCTIONS ARE EXCHANGED, SO GROWS YOUR POWER

GREETINGS ILAHN MINISTER OF CADAPOR
I HAVE COME AN EXCEEDINGLY LONG WAY TO MEET YOU

RHO RHUSTANE MINISTER LAHN
GREETINGS ah HAVE YOU A TITLE?
NOT HERE
HERE I'M JUST A MERCHANT
THE LADY GIATAN OUR MUTUAL ACQUAINTANCE SPEAKS HIGHLY OF YOUR BUSINESS ACUMEN
DOES SHE
IT'S TRUE MY EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF CAPADOR HAVE BEEN HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL
SO MUCH SO THAT NEWS OF YOU HAS DRAWN ME ALL THE WAY FROM ELYSIA
I WAS HOPING YOU COULD MAKE SOME TIME FREE FOR A FELLOW BUSINESSMAN TO DISCUSS A MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL PROPOSITION
HMMMMM I KNOW DEMETRIA WELL BUT I'M NOT FAMILIAR WITH ANY CITY NAMED ELYSIA
THAT'S BECAUSE ELYSIA IS NOT ON DEMETRIA, MINISTER OF CAPADOR
NOT ON
HOW INTERESTING
RHO WAS IT?
LET'S DISPENSE WITH TITLES
CALL ME LAHN
PLEASE HAVE A SEAT
TELL ME OF YOUR FAR CITY


SO
AFTER LEAVING MY UNCLE'S CITY AND FINDING MYSELF IN AKASA I WAS FIRST WELCOMED AS THE MINISTER OF MERIDIAN AND THEN CHAINED AS A POLITICAL PRISONER
I MANAGED TO PULL MY CHAINS LOOSE AND WANDERED UNTIL I FOUND YOU HERE
I HAVE TO GET HOME TO RAISE AN ARMY AGAINST ILAHN
IF HE IS NOT STOPPED ALL OF DEMETRIA WILL SOON BE UNDER HIS CONTROL
ILAHN IS A MONSTER
HE'LL DO ANYTHING TO ACHIEVE ABSOLUTE POWER
I MIGHT BE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN STOP HIM BUT I NEED YOUR HELP
LEND ME A SHIP TO GET BACK TO MERIDIAN, AND I'LL SEND BACK TWO TO REPLACE IT
AND JUST HOW DO WE KNOW THAT'LL HAPPEN?
YOU HAVE MY PROMISE AND MY WORD AS MINISTER OF MERIDIAN THAT NOT ONLY WILL YOUR SHIP BE REPLACED BUT I'LL
WE'LL FIX AND STRENGTHEN YOUR ENTIRE FLEET
WE MAKE OUR FORTUNE BY GETTING WHAT'S HERE OUT OF HERE BY THOSE SHIPS
WE CAN'T JUST HAND ONE OVER ON EVEN THE BEST PROMISE
BUT PART OF OUR LOAD'S DUE FOR MERIDIAN
IF YOU'LL JUST WAIT WE'LL DELIVER YOU HOME

SO WHO IS THAT GIRL WILEM?
SHE WALKED OUT OF THE WOODS HONDELL SAYS
OH?
FOR A RUNAWAY, SHE SEEMS SO INTENT
DON'T GET DISTRACTED GERRIS
AFTER WE GUIDE THIS LOG UNDER THE BARGE WE'LL GO JOIN THEM
CUT YOUR LINE NOW
GERRIS! ROPE!
GOT IT
NOT THE WRONG ONE
THE STACK'S FREE!
WATCH IT!
KRAAK
I GOT IT
NO!
DON'T TRY TO GRAB IT BACK!
GET AWAY!

OH NO
HEY UP!
MOVE THE BARGE!
KRAK
I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING!
KRAAAK
KREAKK
YAAAAH
WHUMP
HUNH!
KRAK
KRAK

Accidents are a fact of life
As disappointing and horrifying as these are
it's as we say "we plan and prepare but can't avoid fate's stare"
The bright side of those moments of crisis is that these also offer us the opportunity to find we can do far more than we ordinarily could

Which set me
with a dilemma

I could do more than an ordinary person
Should I try to help?
Would my strange power hold back the rising timbers?
There was no one I could turn to for guidance
Papa's teachings never included this
But I had no trouble making a decision

The people of Meridian would never hesitate to come to the aid of anyone in trouble

and I was still and forever
a daughter of Meridian
So there was
never a question
I should
I would

...and I COULD!

Just as we sailors learn to feel and use the flow of wind around our ships to maneuver them through the sky

I was learning to plant the effects of my own currents against the movement of the airs

I found I could absorb some essence of their velocity

making me fast easier as it were on

HUH

THAT GIRL'S FLYING ROOM

I SEE THAT BAERN

though it still wasn't EASY

but I did it!

Which left me only the question of what to do next
They'd watched me
They'd seen what I could do
But how would they react?
I'd wondered what these people were truly like
now I'd find out

The CrossGen Universe created by Mark Alessi & Gina M. Villa

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MERIDIAN
BARBARA KESEL
STEVE MCNIVEN
TOM SIMMONS
MORRY HOLLOWELL

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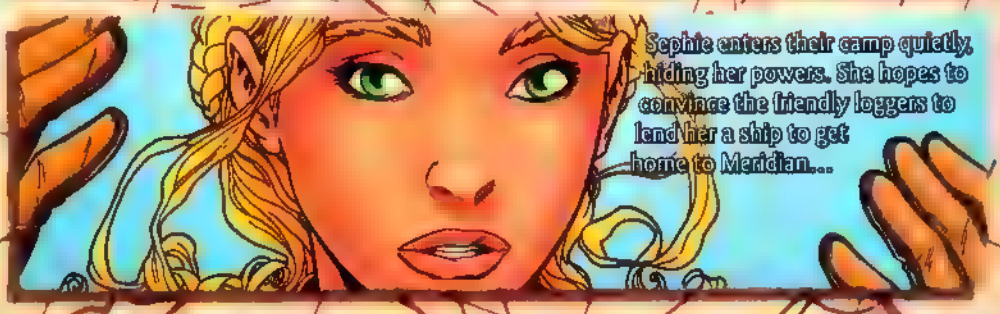

Sephie enters their camp quietly, hiding her powers. She hopes to convince the friendly loggers to lend her a ship to get home to Meridian...

...before an accident lets loose a shiptul of the flying timber and Sephie must save the day. She wonders how she will be treated by the loggers now that they know what she can really do.

I was taunting the Edge
but the monster who stole children from the rim of the floating islands couldn't touch me
The Edge would NEVER threaten me again
I could FLY
I was more frightened for Meridian than for myself
I hoped my city was faring well under Uncle Hann's heavy-handed touch
The stars shining overhead reminded me that Papa was watching over us both, Meridian above and me down below
The loggers had shown me only kindness, even after my display
Even so, I'd needed some time alone to rest and just BE
The surface world seemed so limitless, the way it rambled on and on
much like I'm doing now
It was SO vast during the day I'd seen the span of TWO Meridians
and no side of the other rim
How strange, to live without knowing the limits of your world

SEPHIE
YES?
WHO'S CALLING ME?
KNOW
IS ANYBODY THERE?
JUST ME SEPHIE
YOU REMEMBER ME RIGHT?
Oh! SORRY GHETAN
FOR A MOMENT, I THOUGHT YOU WERE SOMEONE VERY DIFFERENT

LOVELY PERCH YOU'VE DISCOVERED. WERE YOUR THOUGHTS AS DEEP AS THE CANYON?
I WAS JUST LOOKING AT THE STARS AND THINKING OF MERIDIAN
I'M LOOKING SO FORWARD TO GETTING HOME
YOU WILL GAIN YOUR STAND AGAIN CHILD BUT YOUR PATHWAY HOME TWISTS A TURN DEEPER BEFORE IT RISES TO THE CLOUDS
WAITING FOR YOU DOWN BELOW IS A GIFT
GO TO THE CAVERNS
GO

GO?
YES
I THINK IT'S TIME TO REJOIN THE OTHERS
YOU'RE RIGHT
THEY'RE MY HOSTS I'M BEING RUDE
I'LL TELL THEM THEY DON'T NEED TO RUSH THEIR DELIVERY SCHEDULE ON MY ACCOUNT
SINCE I'M ON THE SURFACE I SHOULD KEEP ON TO THE CAVERNS.
IF I GO HOME NOW, ALL I CAN DO IS MARSHALL MERIDIAN'S WEAKER FORCES AGAINST CADADOR'S TROOPS
WE NEED ALLIES
There was something so comforting about Ghetan
so familiar
strange how I can't remember meeting him, yet it feels like I've known him forever
NO ONE'S EVER TRIED TO GET THE CAVERNS AND THE SURFACE CITIES UNITED WITH THE SKY CITIES
IF I CAN GET THEM TO JOIN ME WE'D HAVE THE THREE PARTS OF TRADE - RESOURCES CRAFTSMEN, AND TRANSPORTATION -- WITHOUT CADADOR!
IF I CAN CONVINCE THEM IT WOULD WORK. WE CAN CREATE A COALITION WITH THE ECONOMIC POWER TO W.THSTAND !LAHN!
DO YOU THINK I'M DOING THE RIGHT THING?
IT'S A HARD ROAD YOU'RE PROPOSING, SEPHIE BUT IT'S THE ONE MOST LIKELY TO CARRY YOU WHERE YOU NEED TO GO
AS LONG AS IT LEADS TO MERIDIAN'S FREEDOM FROM MY UNCLE, IT'S THE RIGHT ROAD
YOU READY SERRIS?

DO YOU ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR MISTAKE?
YES, I DO
BY NOT PAYING ATTENTION TO MY DUTIES I PUT THE CAMP AND THE CREW AT RISK
AND NOW YOU'RE READY TO FACE THE PRICE OF THAT LAPSE?
UHHHH, I
SPEAK UP, BOY
FILL THE WOODS WITH YOUR VOICE
I'M GLAD NOBODY GOT HURT
GLAD THAT THAT GIRL CAME ALONG IN TIME TO SAVE US ALL FROM MY DUMB MISTAKE
I'VE *MADE* MY MISTAKE, AND NOW I'M READY TO TAKE MY PUNISHMENT
CARRY THAT THOUGHT BOY
YOU'VE GOT A SHORT TRAIL AHEAD OF YOU

- BUT IT'LL BE THE LONGEST YOU'VE EVER WALKED
CAN YOU FEEL THE WEIGHT OF YOUR MISTAKE, GERRIS?
SHAME ON YOU LAD
T'S YOUR MISTAKE
YOU COULD'VE COST US DEARLY
YOU'LL NEVER FORGET NOW!
CARRY THAT BURDEN TO THE CHOPPING BLOCK
YOU PUT THE WHOLE CAMP IN JEOPARDY GERR'S
YOU.
THAT'S A BIG MISTAKE
ONE THAT WILL HAUNT YOU UNTIL IT'S PUT TO RIGHTS

CARRY IT
IT'S YOUR BURDEN
GERRIS
YOUR FAULT
GERRIS
A BIG MISTAKE
BEAR IT LIKE A MAN
CAN'T KEEP IT
FEEL THE WEIGHT OF IT
GERRIS
MISTAKE
CARRY YOUR MISTAKE
BEAR THE BURDEN
FOR THE GOOD OF THE CAMP AND THE ATONEMENT OF ALL--
--THIS ERROR MUST BE SACRIFICED AND *FED* TO THE *FIRE!*
STRIKE!
GNNN
WHAT?!

STOP!
DON'T KILL HIM!
IT WAS ONLY A MISTAKE!
SKHRIIIP
KRAK
KHA
THUKK
WHA ?
BUT
OH!
THIS LOOKS LIKE !
HA!
IT IS A MISTAKE!
MY MISTAKE!
A WELL CARVED ONE DON'T YOU THINK?
HERE, SEPHIE

-FEED A SPLINTER TO THE FIRE AND HELP *ELIMINATE* IT!
WE ALL MAKE MISTAKES
IF YOU DON'T FIND A WAY TO LET IT GO, YOU'RE STUCK CARRYING IT AROUND FOREVER
SO WHEN WE SCREW UP, WE JUST CARRY IT A SHORT WAYS
--BUT LONG ENOUGH TO REMEMBER THE HEAT OF ALL THOSE EYES ON YOU AND THE WEIGHT OF YOUR MISTAKE
THEN YOU TOSS IT TO THE FLAMES AND MOVE ON
I KNOW FROM EXPERIENCE THAT YOU DON'T MAKE THE SAME MISTAKE TWICE
YOU CARVE *NEW* ONES
MINISTER SEPHIE *WE* DON'T WANT TO MAKE THE *MISTAKE* OF ALIENATING YOU OR MERIDIAN -
WE'LL MAKE A SHIP AVAILABLE TO YOU
Oh!
THANK YOU BUT
YOU'RE DOING THE RIGHT THING
WHAT I REALLY NEED NOW ARE ALLIES
AND INTRODUCTIONS
I'M NOT GOING BACK TO MERIDIAN JUST YET
WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT THE PEOPLE OF THE CAVERNS?
I KNOW THAT, SPARKLY HANDS OR NOT, IF YOU'RE GOING TO HEAD INTO THAT ROUGH WORLD, YOU NEED A *CREW*
SOME OF US CAN BE SPARED FOR A TIME
NO JOKE!
LET US *SHOW* YOU, NOT *TELL* YOU, HOW TO HANDLE YOURSELF IN THOSE PARTS
DEAL?

I CAN'T EVEN BEGIN TO COMPREHEND WHAT SORT OF DEALINGS MIGHT BE GOING ON IN THERE!
THIS IS UNHEARD OF!
THEY'VE BEEN IN THERE ALL THIS TIME?
LOCKED IN BOSCAL!
I'M SURE BUT HE WON'T EVEN ALLOW ME IN TO CLEAN!
HMPFH!
WHO KNOWS WHAT COULD BE SO IMPORTANT THAT HE'S SHUT US OUT?
I'M CURIOUS, RHO RUSTANE
WHAT REALLY BROUGHT YOU HERE TO CAPADOR FROM THIS CITY YOU COME FROM THAT IS NOT OF MY WORLD?
CERTAINLY IT'S NOT SIMPLY THE OPPORTUNITY TO DRINK WITH ME?
WHY CAN'T YOU BELIEVE I JUST WANT TO SHARE POWER WITH A LIKE MINDED MAN?
shlck
IS GENEROSITY UNKNOWN ON YOUR WORLD?

GENEROSITY ALWAYS HAS A PRICE... IF I ACCEPT POWER FROM YOU I BECOME YOUR VASSAL
I HAVE MY OWN POWER THEREFORE I DO NOT NEED YOURS NOR DO I NEED A RELATIONSHIP OF DEPENDENCY
YOU ARE THE STUBBORNEST MORTAL I HAVE EVER MET!
-hics-
I TAKE IT BACK
I'M NOT SHARING WITH YOU
HOW ABOUT SHARING IT WITH ME?
MISS TERAMU!
YOU--ARE NOT A PART OF THIS TRANSACTION!
I AM NOW
WHAT DO YOU SAY RHO?
WOULDN'T YOU PREFER AN APPRECIATIVE BENEFICIARY?
NOW THERE'S AN IDEA
LAST OPPORTUNITY TO YOU, LAHN
-hics-
YOU TAKE IT, OR IT GOES TO HER
AS I SAID BEFORE--
QUITE CLEARLY
I DECLINE YOUR OFFER
SO I UNDERSTAND
I HOPE YOU WILL NOT COME TO REGRET YOUR DECISION MINISTER LAHN
MISS TERAMU!

=hic=
LET ME SHOW YOU WHAT IT MEANS TO BE TOUCHED BY THE POWER OF THE FIRST!

THERE'S OUR NEW HOME LOUWEL
ALL I SEE ARE A BUNCH OF ROCKS
IT'S A NEW START IN *TWO* WAYS FOR US, MIRA
IT'LL BE A TOUGH BATTLE BUT SHE'S WORTH TAMING
JON!
DO YOU MEAN THE NEW IS. AND OR *ME*?
I'M GLAD YOU LET ME COME WITH YOU... EVEN THOUGH I DON'T KNOW SHIPS
WITH ME, I MEAN AND I'LL MAKE YOU FEEL YOU WERE BORN ON THE WIND!
THE NEW ISLAND DOESN'T HAVE A NAME YET DOES IT?
WHO GETS TO NAME IT?
THIS TRIP WAS JON TAMARA'S IDEA, MIRA
SEEMS TO ME HE OUGHT TO HAVE THE HONOR
KNOWING JON, THOUGH - IT'LL BE PUT UP TO VOTE

JAD?

DO WE--

DO *WE* HAVE TO GO *FIRST?*

ABSOLUTELY!

ISN'T THIS INCREDIBLE?

WE'LL BE THE FIRST MERIDIANITES TO SET FOOT ON THE NEW MERIDIAN!

OH

YES, THAT'S WONDERFUL

I'M SORRY FEABIE I FORGOT YOU'RE NOT--

NO, I'M NOT AM I?

I'M NOT *SEPHIE*

I'M JUST THE INEXPERIENCED ONE GOOD ONLY FOR RINGING OUT THE RIGHT PATTERN TO THE OTHER SHIPS

DON'T BE SAD, FEABIE

YOU'RE SO MUCH MORE VALUABLE THAN THAT

I'LL GET YOU THERE OKAY AND TAKE CARE OF YOU FOR A LONG TIME AFTER THAT

WILL YOU?

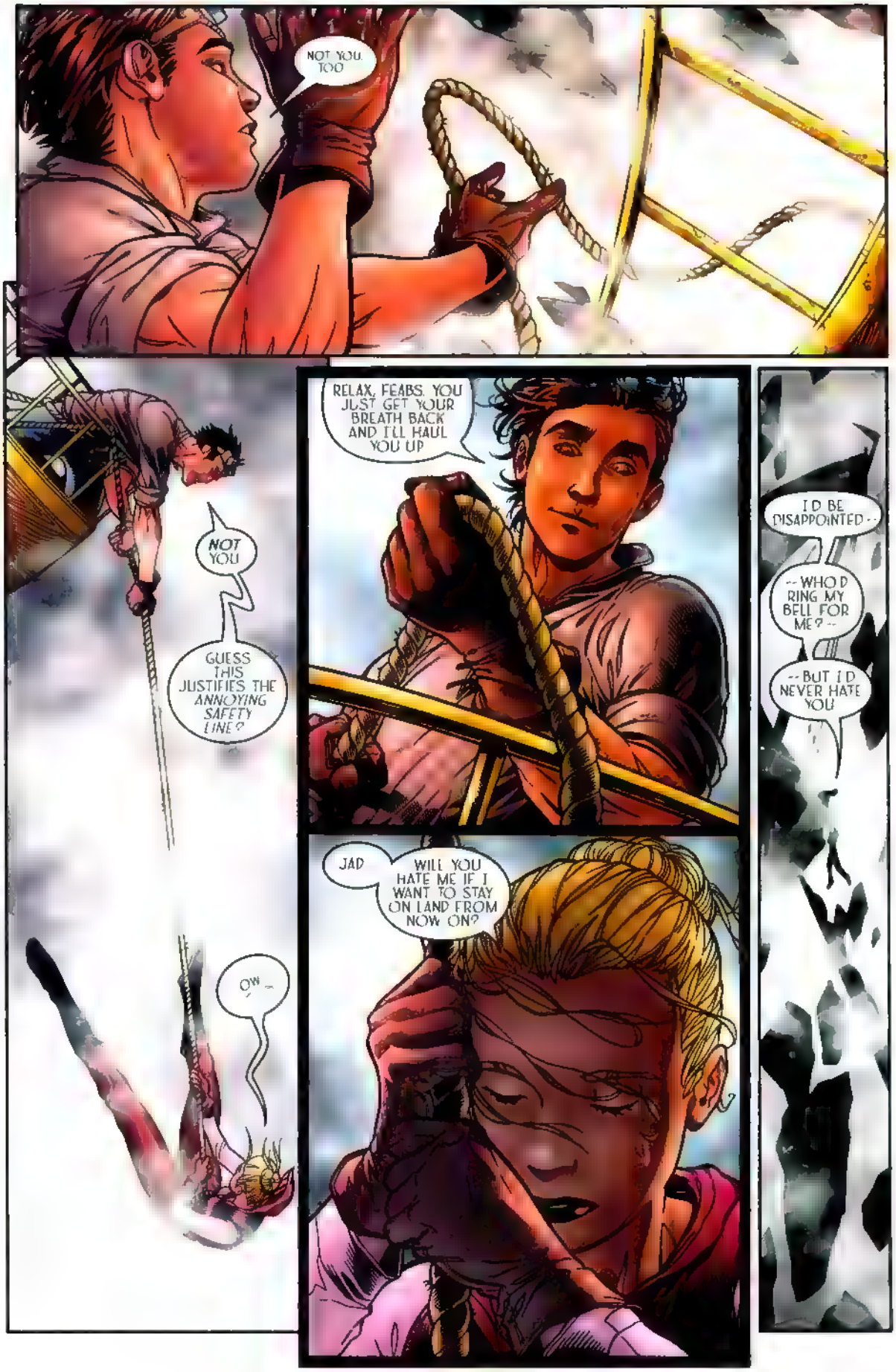
I THINK I'LL MAKE YOU *PROVE* THAT TO ME

TWO LONG FEABIE

KRANNNG KRANNNG

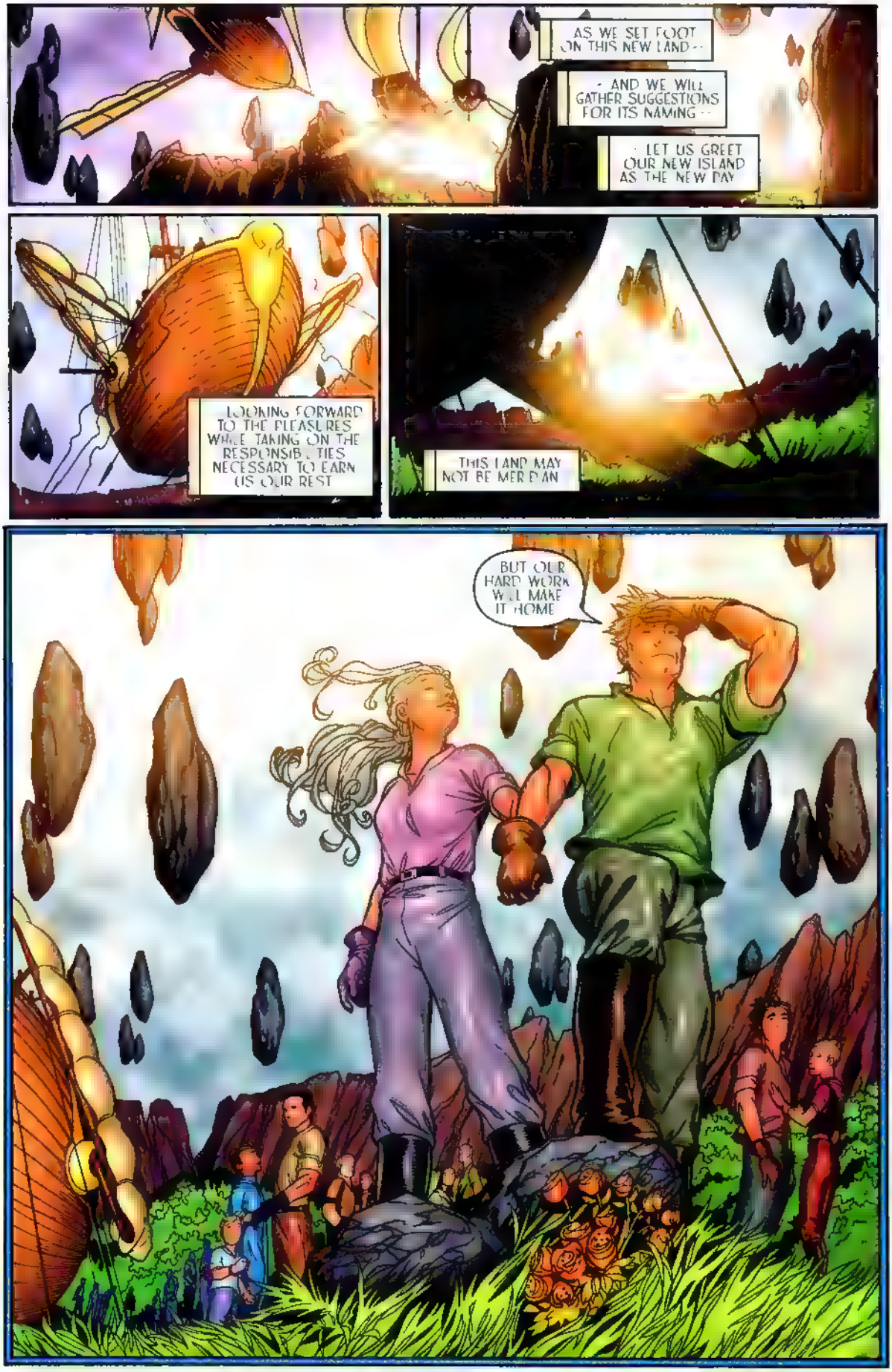
UP -- ONE SHORT
KLANG
NOW TWO SHORT!
KLANG KLANG
GET READY, FEAB!
ARE WE IN TROUBLE?
NAH --
THIS IS THE FUN PART!
ONE LONG!
KRAANNNG
ONE LONG MEANS TO MY RIGHT?
IT'S LONG FOR THE HORIZONTAL PLANE AND SHORT FOR THE VERTICAL AXIS
TWO ONG
KRAANNNG KRAANNNG
ONE SHORT
KLANG
ONE SHORT AGAIN!
KLANG
ONE LONG
IS THAT AHEAD OR UP?
BOTH -- IT'S USUALLY CLEAR WHAT'S NEEDED
FEABIE HOW DID YOU GROW UP WITHOUT EVER LEARNING SHIP'S CALLS?
KRAANNNG

IT WAS SEPHIE'S JOB TO KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT MERIDIAN AND ITS SHIPS
IT WAS MY JOB TO TAKE CARE OF SEPHIE
I'M SORRY SHE'S GONE
BUT I CAN'T BE HER FOR YOU DAD
HEY LOOK AT ME
I'M JON TAKARTY'S SON
THE FAMOUS CAPTAIN, ADVENTURER, COUNCILOR TO MERIDIAN
TUROS BEST FRIEND, ET CETERA
EVERYBODY LOOKS UP TO HIM
THEN THEY LOOK AT ME AND WONDER WHAT HAPPENED
I KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE SECOND BEST, FEAB BUT YOU'RE YOUR OWN BEST SELF AND THAT'S A... YOU CAN...
ONE SHORT! ONE LONG!
NOW!
KLANG KRANNNG
NNGH!
KRAAK
AIEEEEE!
FEABLE!


NOT YOU, TOO
NOT YOU
GUESS THIS JUSTIFIES THE ANNOYING SAFETY LINE?
OW--
RELAX, FEABS. YOU JUST GET YOUR BREATH BACK AND I'LL HAUL YOU UP
JAD
WILL YOU HATE ME IF I WANT TO STAY ON LAND FROM NOW ON?
I'D BE DISAPPOINTED--
--WHO'D RING MY BELL FOR ME?--
--BUT I'D NEVER HATE YOU

KLANK KRANNG KRANNG
JADS THROUGH THE CATARACT!
YOU CAN SEE THROUGH THIS MURK? I ENVY YOU YOUR YOUNG EYES!
JON! GET OUT OF YOUR MAPS!
YOU'RE MISSING IT! THERE'S OUR NEW MERIDIAN!
NOW, MIRA IT WON'T BE JUST LIKE MERIDIAN WE CAN'T LET OURSELVES EXPECT TO HAVE IT BE AS--
OH, LOOK AT IT, JON!
IT'S BEAUTIFUL

JUST
BEAUTIFUL


AS WE SET FOOT ON THIS NEW LAND--
- AND WE WILL GATHER SUGGESTIONS FOR ITS NAMING--
- LET US GREET OUR NEW ISLAND AS THE NEW DAY
LOOKING FORWARD TO THE PLEASURES WHILE TAKING ON THE RESPONSIBILITIES NECESSARY TO EARN US OUR REST
THIS LAND MAY NOT BE MERIDAN
BUT OUR HARD WORK WILL MAKE IT HOME

Out of courtesy to my jogger companions, I walked every step WITH them not above them
There'd be time enough to fly
My next challenge was to be a good enough ambassador to the people of the caverns to win them to my cause
It struck me then
No sky city Ministers ever went to ground
Representatives came up, but only trade ships went down
It was time to forge a stronger bond between earth and sky
and I would be the ink

The CrossGen Universe created by Mark Alessi & Gina M. Villa

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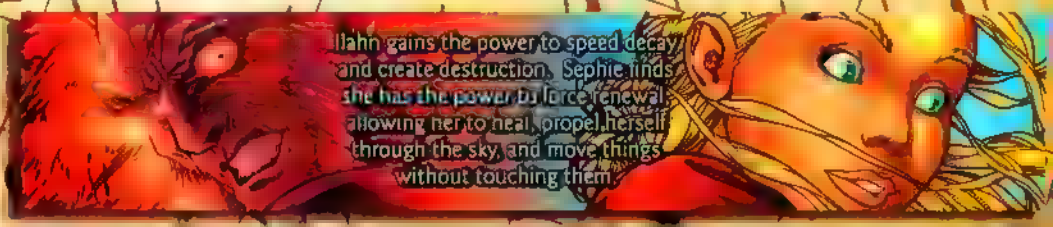
1 YEAR ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

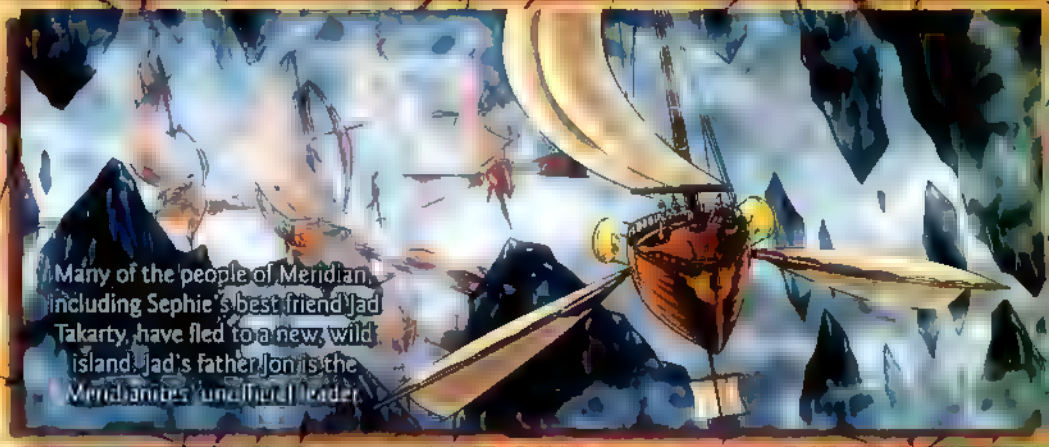
Far away on the world of Demetria, explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

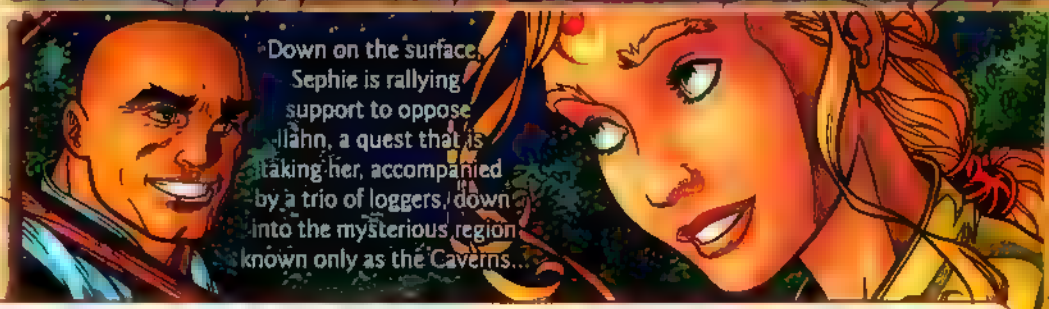
One of these islands is Meridian, home of shipbuilders and Sephie, the daughter of Minister Turos. Sephie's life has been spent being groomed to someday take over the ruling of Meridian. Her uncle Ilahn is the Minister of the rich city-state of Cadador, which controls most of the shipping and trade on Demetria.

When a mysterious force endows both brothers with the Sigil, a link to power, Turos (weakened by Ilahn s poisoning) dies, and his sigil is transferred to Sephie.


Ilahn gains the power to speed decay and create destruction. Sephie finds she has the power to force renewal, allowing her to heal, propel herself through the sky, and move things without touching them.

Ilahn tries, and fails, to control Sephie. Now he wants to gain control of all Demetria, beginning with his conquest of the island where he was born: Meridian. With the help of his newly-powered follower Reesha, Rho Rustanie of the First, and the enigmatic Muse of Glatan, Ilahn seems to be on the path to success.

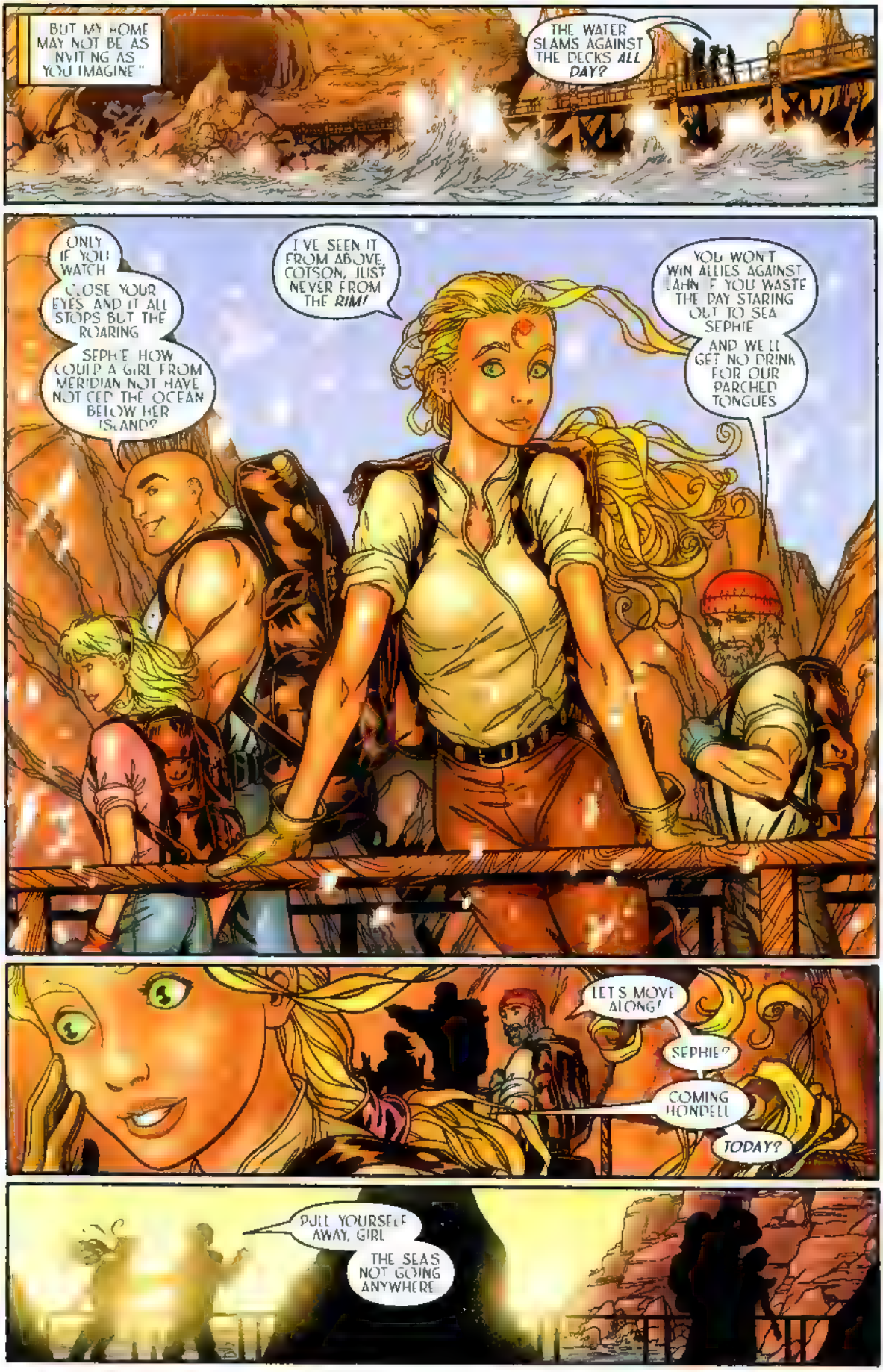

Many of the people of Meridian, including Sephie's best friend Jad Takarty, have fled to a new, wild island. Jad's father Jon is the Meridianites' unofficial leader.


Down on the surface, Sephie is rallying support to oppose Ilahn, a quest that is taking her, accompanied by a trio of loggers, down into the mysterious region known only as the Caverns...

Meridian™ CrossGen Comics CrossGeneration Comics Meridian™ the Crossover

WHO IS THIS MAN YOU HAVE BROUGHT TO ME, MUSE?
WHERE DOES HIS POWER COME FROM? HOW COULD HE SO CASUALLY GIVE SOME TO REESHA?
DOES HE BEAR THE SAME SIGIL AS I, BUT CONCEALED?
SOMETHING SIMILAR BUT NOT COMPLETE
HE IS HERE TO BE BOTH SPUR AND LURE.
I SHOULD KNOW BY NOW THAT AT... YOU WILL OFFER ME BETWEEN YOUR DISAPPEARANCES IS A VAGUE SENSE OF MYSTERY NOT FACTS.
YOU SEEM INTENT ON FORCING SOME DIRECTION ON ME
IS THIS RHO RHUSTANE PART OF YOUR V SIONS?
I SEE, AS ALWAYS, BEYOND THE NOW TO THE RESULT
SOMETIMES I MUST COAX IT CLOSER
STILL, YOU SHOULD HAVE CONSULTED ME BEFORE BRINGING HIM HERE
INCLUDE ME AND I WILL BE PARTY TO YOUR P ANS
CONFOUND ME AND YOU MIGHT FIND THAT I MAKE YOU AN AGENT OF MINE
YOURS IS A FASCINATING SPIRIT, MINISTER OF CADADOR
UNFETTERED BY ANY CARE FOR OTHERS
MY ONLY NIECE REJECTED ME, MUSE, AS DID HER MOTHER
MY LINE ENDS WITH
IT IS ONLY THROUGH MY ACTIONS THAT I WILL BE REMEMBERED
SO I WILL BE THE FIRST MINISTER OF ALL ISLANDS
MY NAME WILL BE KNOWN FOR ALL TIME

REESHA!
STOP THAT AT ONCE!
YOU'RE FRIGHTENING THE POPULACE
IF YOU WISH MINISTER LAHN
BUT I'M MERELY PRACTICING MY NEW SKILLS
SURELY YOU WANT ME TO MAKE MYSELF *USEFUL* TO YOU?
I TELL YOU MUSE THIS SITUATION HOLDS WITHIN IT THE SEEDS OF
MUSE?
<SIGH>
I'M SO DISAPPOINTED MINISTER LAHN
I THOUGHT YOU'D BE PLEASED AT THE PROSPECT OF A TRUE PARTNER
I HAVE NO PEERS, MISS TERAMU --
--JUST LESSERS OF MANY LEVELS
ONE LAST GIFT MY DEAR
A TALISMAN BY WHICH YOU CAN CONTACT ME TO REMIND YOU TO *WHOM* YOU ARE BEHOLDEN FOR YOUR POWER
AS YOU ARE TO ME?
WILL THAT COURTESY BE REPAID WITH AN INVITATION TO VISIT YOU IN THIS ELYSIA FROM WHICH YOU HAIL?
AHHH
AS A GUEST IS BEHOLDEN TO HIS HOST?
PERHAPS


BUT MY HOME MAY NOT BE AS INVITING AS YOU IMAGINE"
THE WATER SLAMS AGAINST THE DECKS ALL DAY?
ONLY IF YOU WATCH
CLOSE YOUR EYES AND IT ALL STOPS BUT THE ROARING
SEPHIE HOW COULD A GIRL FROM MERIDIAN NOT HAVE NOTICED THE OCEAN BELOW HER ISLAND?
I'VE SEEN IT FROM ABOVE, COTSON, JUST NEVER FROM THE RIM!
YOU WON'T WIN ALLIES AGAINST LAHN IF YOU WASTE THE DAY STARING OUT TO SEA SEPHIE
AND WE'LL GET NO DRINK FOR OUR PARCHED TONGUES
LET'S MOVE ALONG!
SEPHIE?
COMING HONDELL
TODAY?
PULL YOURSELF AWAY, GIRL
THE SEAS NOT GOING ANYWHERE

DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE INSIDE THE CAVERNS SEPHIE?
I'VE HEARD STORIES. BUT ALL I'VE EVER SEEN OF THE SURFACE WORLD IS WHAT I'VE BEEN THROUGH ON THIS JOURNEY

I KNOW A GAL SHE KNOWS EVERYBODY AND EVERYTHING ABOUT THE CAVERNS, SO SHE CAN INTRODUCE YOU TO THE IMPORTANT PEOPLE BUT SEPH-
..YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO *SHOW* THEM HERE WHAT YOU CAN DO AND SOON
I DON'T KNOW ABOUT *THAT*

LOOK AROUND
THIS PLACE IS ON THE ROUGH SIDE BUILT FOR GUYS LIKE ME
MINING'S DANGEROUS WORK AND *THEY* DON'T WELCOME STRANGERS WHO'VE LED EASY LIVES UP IN THE SKY. *MUSCLES* VALUED HERE

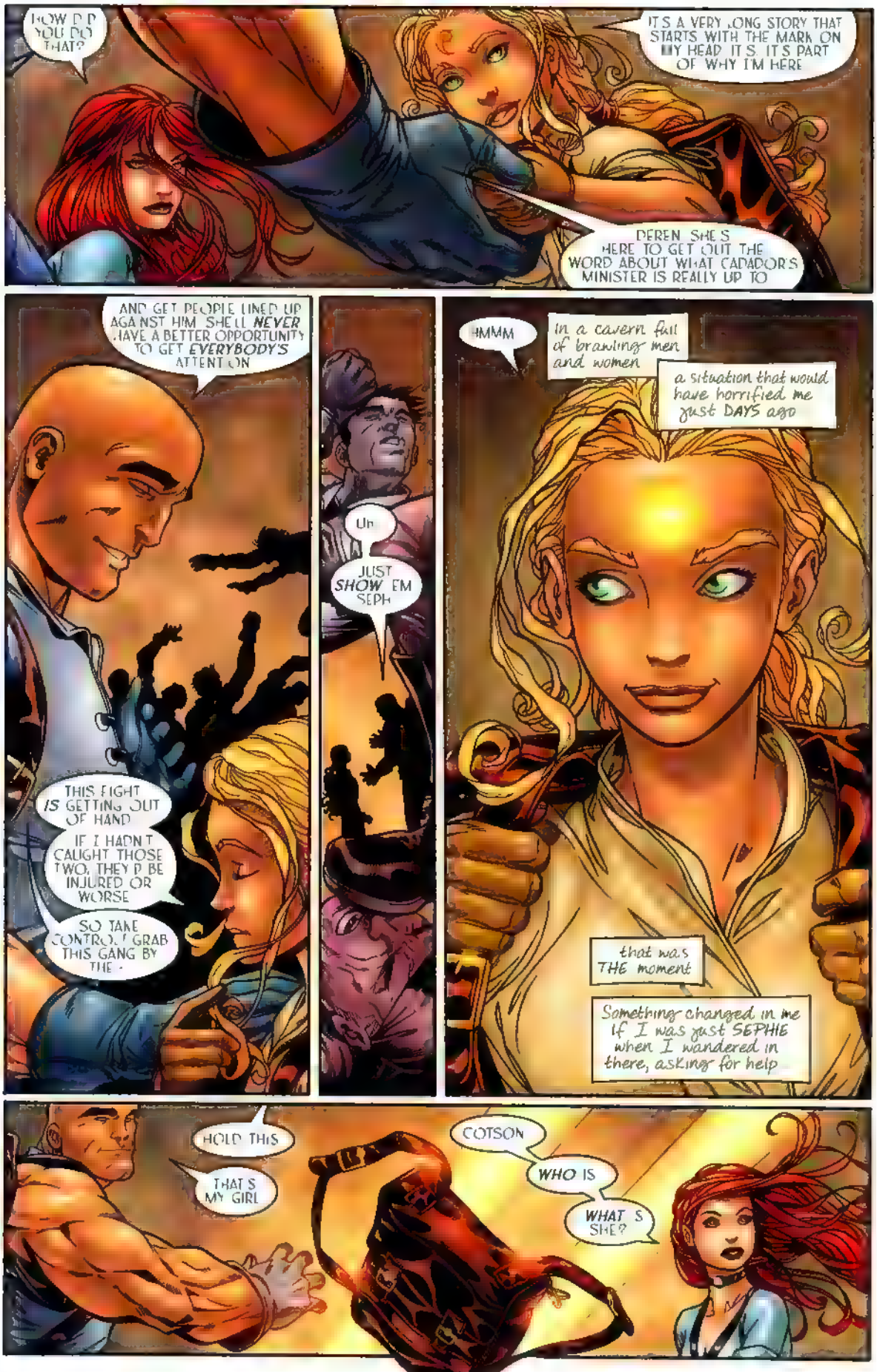
THEY WON'T *JOIN* YOU UNLESS THEY *RESPECT* YOU
THEY WON'T RESPECT YOU UNLESS THEY CAN *FEAR* YOU A LITTLE
ME, I'VE GOT RONDELL AND DANEYN HERE TO KEEP 'EM IN LINE
YOU, YOU NEED TO SHOW 'EM YOU CAN KNOCK 'EM DOWN
BUT BEFORE YOU CAN DO THAT
KRAAK
WHUMP
THUDD
KERRAKK

YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO GET THEIR ATTENTION

DEREN BEJ RUNS THE BEST MEETING HOUSE IN THE CAVERNS
IN FACT, THIS PARTY PROBABLY STARTED AT HER PLACE
SHE'S QUITE A WOMAN. THERE'S NOT A SOUL NEARBY WHO HASN'T FELT THE SOLE OF HER BOOT ON HIS BACKSIDE
I'M NOT TALKING FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE, OF COURSE
OW
WAIT -- LET ME TRY --
HEY, NOW -- DIDN'T KNOW YOU COULD DO *THAT*, SEPHIE
NEITHER DID I. IT JUST SEEMED POSSIBLE
COTSON, YOU OVERSIZED PINHEAD!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING, BRINGING A *KID* IN HERE?
GLAD TO SEE YOU TOO, DEREN. WE'RE JUST SHOWING SEPHIE HERE THE QUIET STREETS OF THE CAVERNS
SEPHIE, MEET

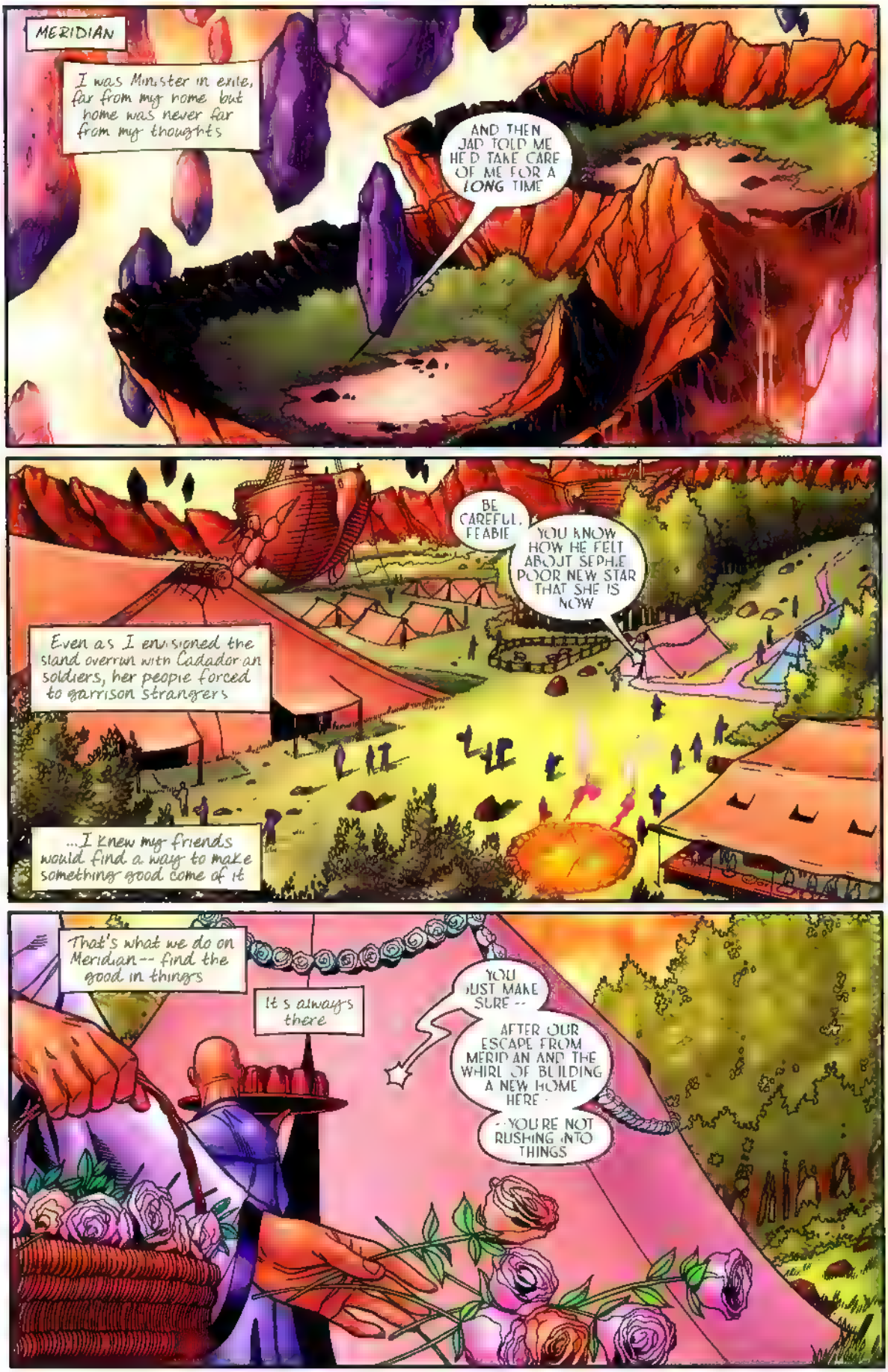
DEREN BEQ
PLEASED TO MEET YOU SEPHIE
WATCH YOUR BACK
IT'S DANGEROUS HERE
OH, SHE'S JUST EXAGGERATING SEPHIE IT'S NOT ALWAYS LIKE THIS
SOMETIMES IT'S WORSE
IT'S ALWAYS LIKE THIS SWAT HIM IF HE TELLS YOU OTHERWISE
NOT TOO MANY PEOPLE END UP DEAD THOUGH
STICK WITH ME
I'LL KEEP YOU SAFE
YOU'LL KEEP ME SAFE?

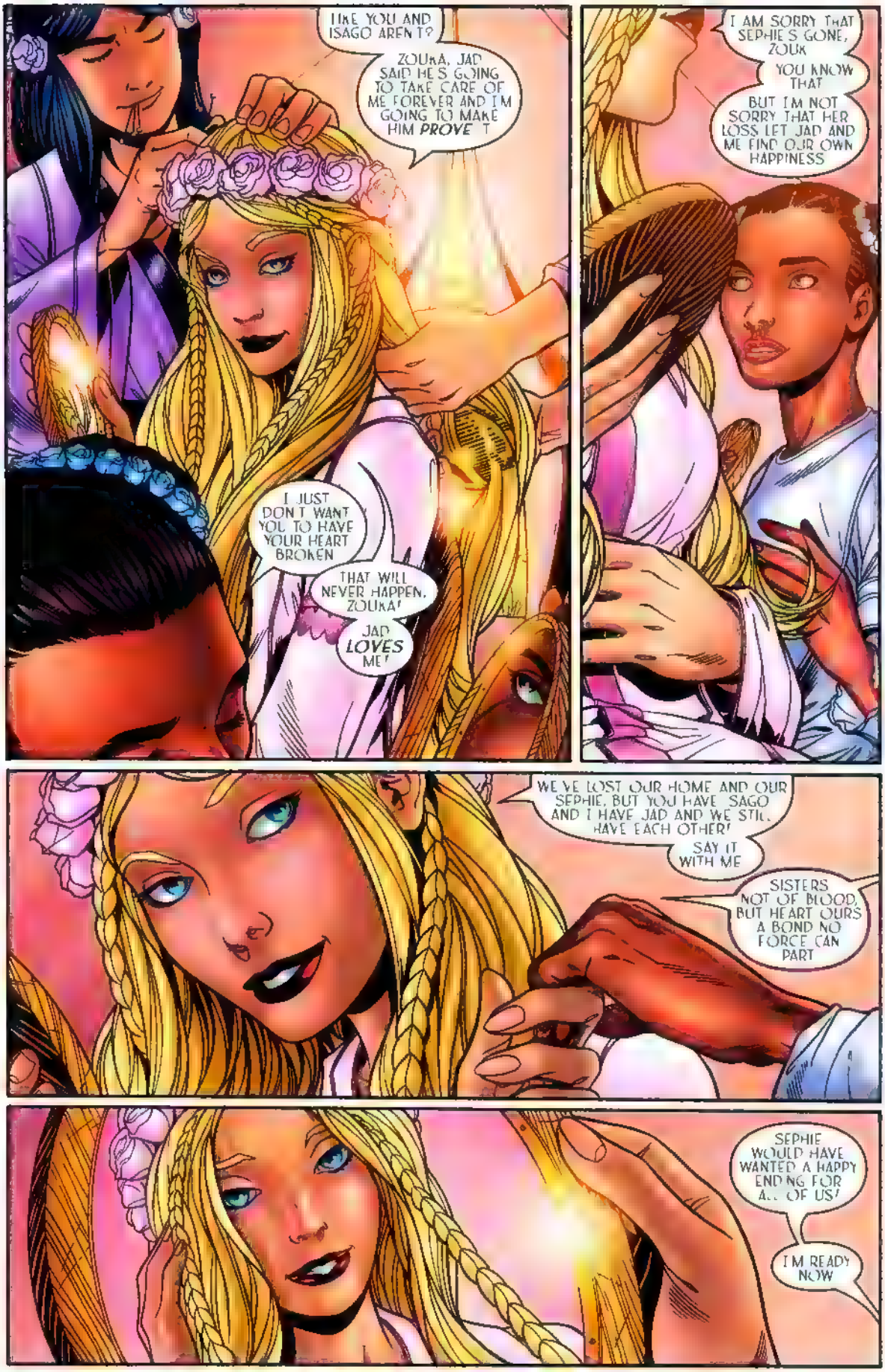
KRAAK
GRAAAH!
HEY!
FROM THIS?
SEPHIE, GET DOWN!
YOU'RE SAFE NOW
I WAS ALREADY SAFE
AND SO WERE THEY
I REALLY CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF


HOW DID YOU DO THAT?
IT'S A VERY LONG STORY THAT STARTS WITH THE MARK ON MY HEAD. IT'S PART OF WHY I'M HERE
DEREN. SHE'S HERE TO GET OUT THE WORD ABOUT WHAT CADADOR'S MINISTER IS REALLY UP TO
AND GET PEOPLE LINED UP AGAINST HIM. SHE'LL NEVER HAVE A BETTER OPPORTUNITY TO GET EVERYBODY'S ATTENTION
THIS FIGHT IS GETTING OUT OF HAND
IF I HADN'T CAUGHT THOSE TWO, THEY'D BE INJURED OR WORSE
SO TAKE CONTROL! GRAB THIS GANG BY THE-
Uh
JUST SHOW 'EM SEPH
HMMM
In a cavern full of brawling men and women
a situation that would have horrified me just DAYS ago
that was THE moment
Something changed in me if I was just SEPHIE when I wandered in there, asking for help
HOLD THIS
THAT'S MY GIRL
COTSON
WHO IS
WHAT'S SHE?

STOP IT!
now I was the MINISTER OF MERIDIAN and I was DEMANDING help
Papa always felt he gained the authority of Minister before he inherited the title
I already had the title, but I only just then found the authority

DEREN BEQ, I'D LIKE YOU TO MEET SEPHIE, MINISTER OF MERIDIAN
I'D HEARD THE GIRL HAD
WHAT'S THE MINISTER OF A SKY CITY DOING DOWN HERE IN THE CAVERNS?
I'D CALL IT FLYING, MYSELF BUT CALL IT WHAT YOU LIKE, IT'S HER LEARNING TO SHOW OFF
LISTEN TO ME!
YOU'RE WASTING ALL THIS AGGRESSION FIGHTING EACH OTHER!
YOU WANT SOMEBODY TO FIGHT? I'LL GIVE YOU SOMETHING REAL TO FIGHT FOR!
WHAT WOULD BEING ABLE TO TRADE DIRECTLY WITH THE SKY CITIES WITHOUT MINISTER CAHN'S CONTROL MEAN TO YOU?
BETTER WAGES? LESS DANGEROUS WORK?
HOW TOUGH ARE YOU?
SHOW ME!
ARE YOU TOUGH ENOUGH TO DEFY CADADOR AND SAVE YOUR FUTURE?
I KNOW HIS PLANS! IF WE DON'T UNITE AGAINST HIM SOON, ALL OF DEMETRIA, ALL OF US, WE'LL BE NOTHING BUT HIS SLAVES!
YOU SEE WHAT I CAN DO?
HE CAN DO WORSE!
YOU THINK THIS IS THE ONE?
SHE COULD BE
WE NEED TO TAKE HER DOWN
I'LL ARRANGE IT
MEET US BEHIND MY PLACE


MERIDIAN
I was Minister in exile, far from my home but home was never far from my thoughts
AND THEN JAD TOLD ME HE'D TAKE CARE OF ME FOR A LONG TIME
BE CAREFUL, FEABIE
YOU KNOW HOW HE FELT ABOUT SEPHIE POOR NEW STAR THAT SHE IS NOW
Even as I envisioned the stand overrun with Cadadorian soldiers, her people forced to garrison strangers
...I knew my friends would find a way to make something good come of it
That's what we do on Meridian -- find the good in things
It's always there
YOU JUST MAKE SURE --
AFTER OUR ESCAPE FROM MERIDIAN AND THE WHIRL OF BUILDING A NEW HOME HERE --
-- YOU'RE NOT RUSHING INTO THINGS

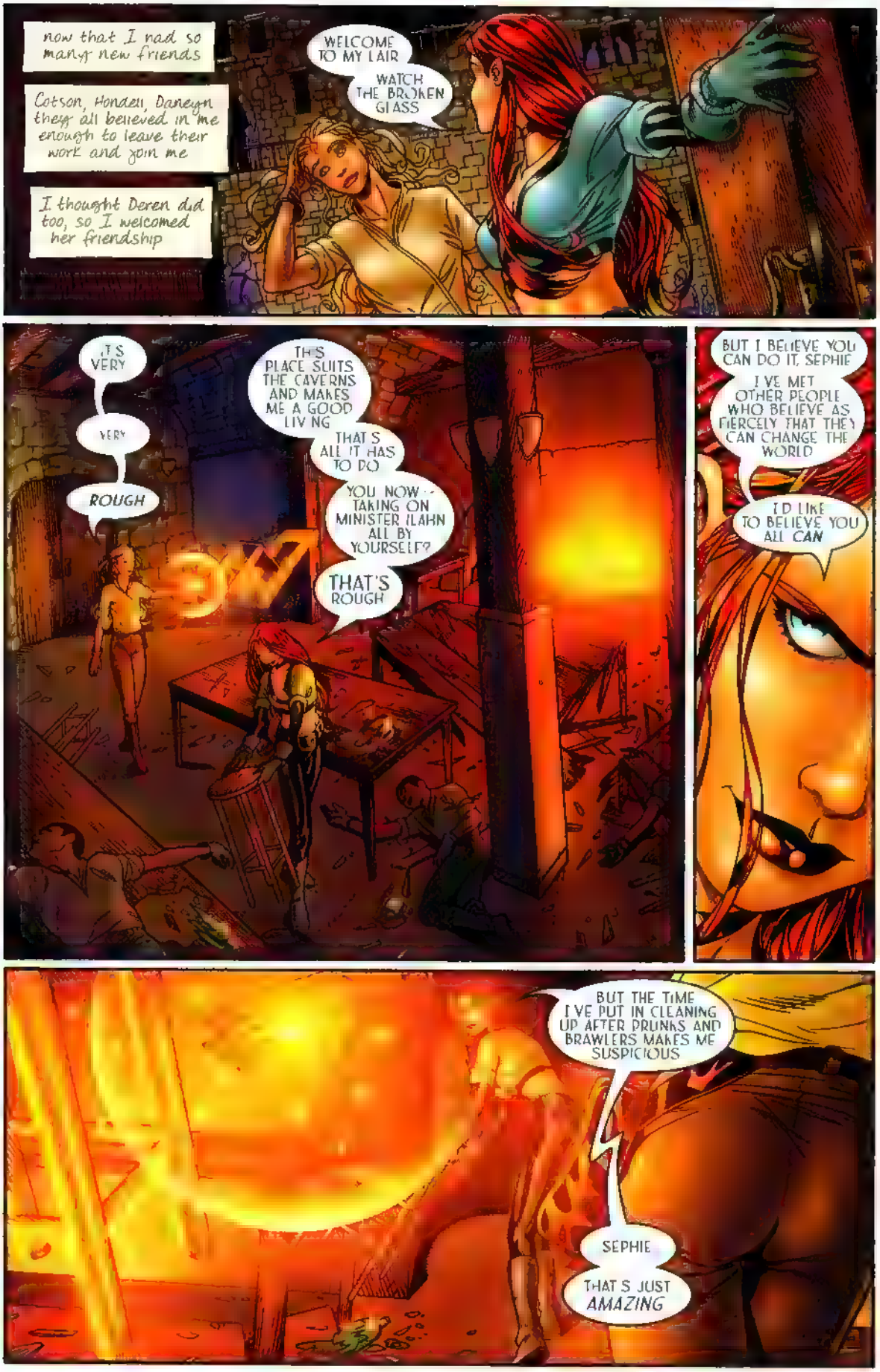

I like you and Isago aren't?
Zouka, Jad said he's going to take care of me forever and I'm going to make him *prove* it
I just don't want you to have your heart broken
That will never happen, Zouka!
Jad *loves* me!
I am sorry that Sephie's gone, Zouk
You know that
But I'm not sorry that her loss let Jad and me find our own happiness
We've lost our home and our Sephie, but you have Sago and I have Jad and we still have each other!
Say it with me
Sisters not of blood, but heart ours a bond no force can part
Sephie would have wanted a happy ending for all of us!
I'm ready now

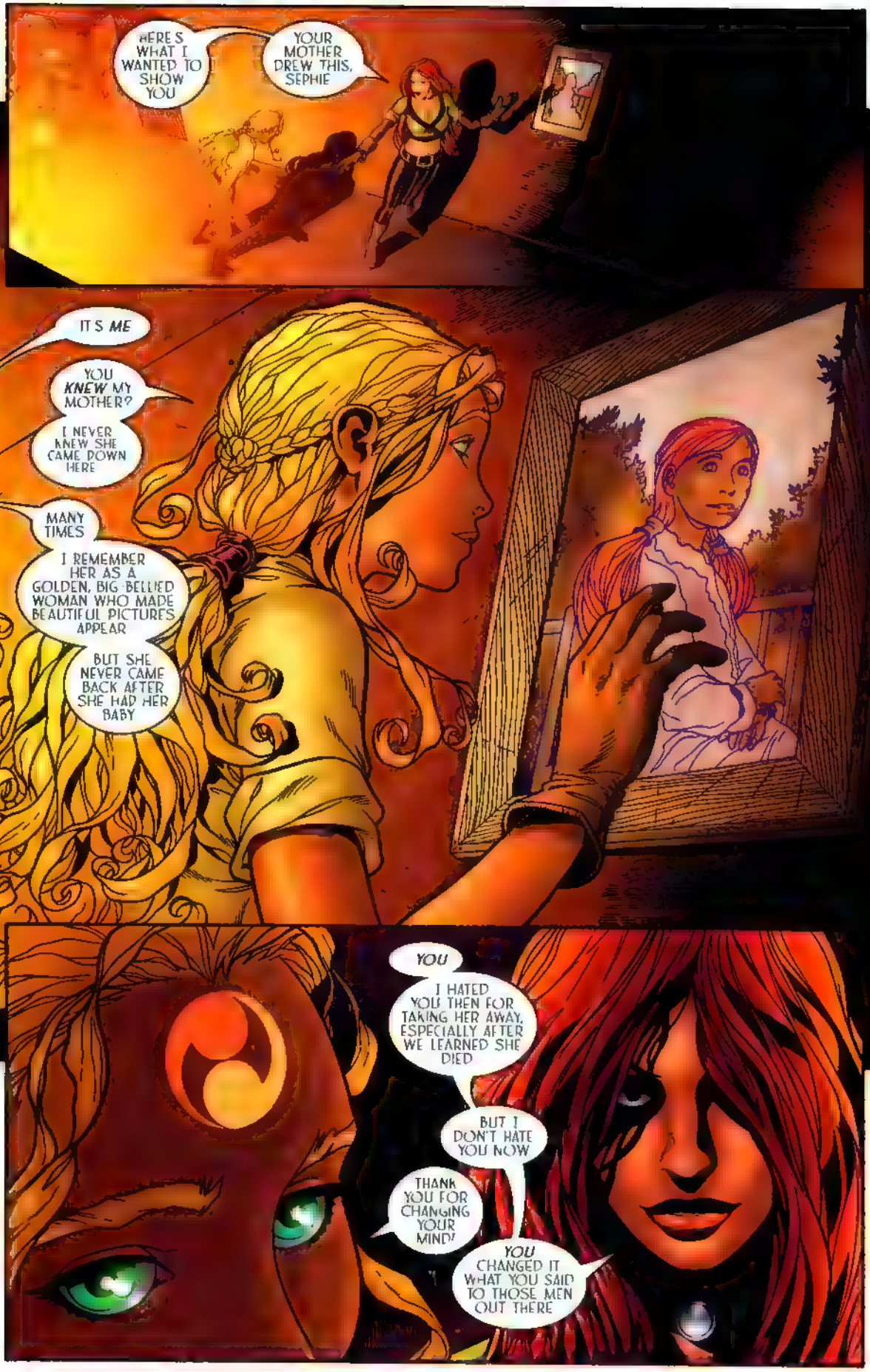
WHAT WELCOME NEWS
I WAS AFRAID YOU WERE GOING TO MAKE ME LATE FOR MY OWN WEDDING!
BUT IT'S OUR FIRST WEDDING, MIRA!
I WANTED TO LOOK PERFECT!
YOU LOOK WONDERFUL, MIRA!
JON'S SO LUCKY!
AS AM I
THANK YOU MARIBET!
FEABIE, ZOUKA--
NO MATTER HOW YOU TWO LOOK, YOU ARE PERFECT
SHALL WE GET STARTED?
IT'S SO SMALL
IT'S NOT RIGHT!
REMEMBER HOW WEDDINGS WERE
--AT HOME?
LET'S LOOK FORWARD, NOT BACK.
OUR MERIDIAN IS LOST NOW, GIRLS
LOOK AT THE MAGICAL PLACE WE'VE MADE OUT OF WHAT WE FOUND HERE
A NEW START ON A NEW ISLAND
IT COULDN'T BE MORE RIGHT

«SIGH»
YOU YOUNGSTERS TODAY
ALWAYS SO EAGER TO RUN OFF AND GET MARRIED
GOT ANY ADVICE FOR ME, O.D MAN?
HMMMM
ALWAYS LISTEN TO YOUR SON AND DO EVERYTHING HIS WAY
WHEN HE'S THE ONE POLISHING MY BOOTS?
NOT LIKELY
THANKS, JAD
SO - HOW'S THE OLD MAN LOOK?
WHATEVER MIRA SEES IN YOU I'S CERTAINLY THERE TODAY
BUT YOU TWO COULD HAVE WAITED FOR US TO CONSTRUCT THE GREAT HALL, DAD
NOW'S THE RIGHT TIME FOR THIS
WE NEEDED A SHARED CELEBRATION DAY TO MAKE THE NEW ISLAND HOME
AND DA-- JON-- YOU WANT TO BE A MARRIED MAN AGAIN?
BOTH JAD
AFTER ALL THE TRAGEDY WE'VE SHARED AND THE PAIN OF HAVING TO UPROOT AND LEAVE MERIDIAN
IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE THE COMFORT OF FAMILIAR RITUALS IN AN UNFAMILIAR PLACE

AND I *REALLY* WANT TO MARRY MIRA!
MIRA PRAJUNA
I ASK YOU HERE, IN THE LOVING PRESENCE OF OUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS, TO MAKE PUBLIC AND KNOWN OUR DECISION TO JOIN OUR HEARTS AND HANDS AS ONE
JON TAKARTY
I JOIN YOU HERE IN THE CIRCLE OF OUR NEIGHBORS, TO AFFIRM OUR DECISION TO LINK HEARTS AND HANDS
...TO GIVE YOU MY PROMISE THAT I WILL STAY BY YOUR SIDE AS LONG AS THE SUN WILL SHINE
AND I GIVE YOU MY OWN THAT I WILL BE BY YOUR SIDE UNTIL WE BOTH JOIN THE STARS IN THE SKY

NOW, WITH A KISS, LET OUR LIVES BE SEALED TOGETHER
LET THIS SAME KISS BE PROOF OF OUR PROMISE W TNESS TO OUR BOND
FROM NOW ON, LET US BE KNOWN AS ONE.
Remembering Meridian my friends didn't leave me feeling as empty now as it had back on Cadador
or Akasia.
I could call to mind happy times without having to cry
or wonder if they ever thought of me
It was good to know that I would never again be so lonely


now that I had so many new friends
Cotson, Honzell, Daneyn they all believed in me enough to leave their work and join me
I thought Deren did too, so I welcomed her friendship
WELCOME TO MY LAIR
WATCH THE BROKEN GLASS
IT'S VERY
VERY
ROUGH
THIS PLACE SUITS THE CAVERNS AND MAKES ME A GOOD LIVING
THAT'S ALL IT HAS TO DO
YOU NOW - TAKING ON MINISTER ILAHN ALL BY YOURSELF?
THAT'S ROUGH
BUT I BELIEVE YOU CAN DO IT, SEPHIE
I'VE MET OTHER PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE AS FIERCELY THAT THEY CAN CHANGE THE WORLD
I'D LIKE TO BELIEVE YOU ALL CAN
BUT THE TIME I'VE PUT IN CLEANING UP AFTER DRUNKS AND BRAWLERS MAKES ME SUSPICIOUS
SEPHIE
THAT'S JUST AMAZING


HERE'S WHAT I WANTED TO SHOW YOU
YOUR MOTHER DREW THIS, SEPHIE
IT'S ME
YOU KNEW MY MOTHER?
I NEVER KNEW SHE CAME DOWN HERE
MANY TIMES
I REMEMBER HER AS A GOLDEN, BIG-BELLIED WOMAN WHO MADE BEAUTIFUL PICTURES APPEAR
BUT SHE NEVER CAME BACK AFTER SHE HAD HER BABY
YOU
I HATED YOU THEN FOR TAKING HER AWAY, ESPECIALLY AFTER WE LEARNED SHE DIED
BUT I DON'T HATE YOU NOW
THANK YOU FOR CHANGING YOUR MIND!
YOU CHANGED IT WHAT YOU SAID TO THOSE MEN OUT THERE

YOU MADE ME BELIEVE
IN WHAT?
IN YOU.
SEPHIE
DON'T HATE ME
WHYMMMMF!
KLIK
THEY NEED YOU
WE NEED YOU
Sometimes I'm too trusting

The CrossGen Universe created by Mark Alessi & Gina M. Villa

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Far away...

on the world of Demetria, explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

One of these islands is **Meridian**, home of shipbuilders and **Sephie**, the daughter of Minister Turos. Sephie's life has been spent being groomed to someday take over the ruling of Meridian. Her uncle **Ilahn** is the Minister of the rich city-state of Cadador, which controls most of the shipping and trade on Demetria.

When a mysterious force endows both brothers with the Sigil, a link to power, Turos (weakened by Ilahn's poisoning) dies, and his sigil is transferred to Sephie.

Ilahn gains the power to speed decay and create destruction. Sephie finds she has the power to force renewal, allowing her to heal, propel herself through the sky, and move things without touching them.

Ilahn tries, and fails, to control Sephie. Now he wants to gain control of all Demetria, beginning with his conquest of the island where he was born: Meridian. With the help of his newly-powered follower **Reesha**, **Rho Rustane** of the First, and the enigmatic **Muse of Giatan**, Ilahn seems to be on the path to success.

Many of the people of Meridian, including Sephie's best friend **Jad Takarty**, have fled to a new, wild island. Jad's father **Jon** is the Meridianites' unofficial leader. He and Mira are wed in the first ceremony on their new home, while Jad and Feabie grow closer.

Ilahn watches in disgust as Reesha flaunts her new powers, but he is too intent on wrangling an invitation to Elysia to criticize Rho for the gift.

Sephie is rallying support to oppose Ilahn, a quest that takes her, accompanied by a trio of loggers, down into the mysterious region known only as the Caverns. Sephie interrupts a brawl with a spectacular display of her powers and wins several people to her cause. She also finds a new friend, **Deren Beq**. A private conversation between them ends with Sephie being grabbed and pulled through a secret panel into...

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Good business is the equitable exchange of goods and services
When issues of power, manipulation and control enter into the process, corruption takes root
Just HAVING the advantage doesn't mean you should TAKE it
Someone had tried to take ME hostage
AGAIN!
They probably wanted to gain control of the power I'd just displayed WITHOUT an exchange.
BAD business
But THIS time I wouldn't end up in chains
Not now that I knew what I could do
WHO ARE YOU?!
DON'T YOU TOUCH ME AGAIN OR I'll--

KILL US?
SEPHIE OF MERIDIAN. WE MEAN YOU NO HARM.
PLEASE DON'T
NOT MUCH CHANCE OF *THAT*, DREN.
IF SHE WERE THE KILLING KIND, WE'D BE ASHES BY NOW.
MY APOLOGIES, MADAME MINISTER.
OUR SECRETIVE WAYS ARE LONG INGRAINED.
WE NEEDED PRIVACY TO APPROACH YOU AND THE LAIR'S PROPRIETRESS IS SYMPATHETIC TO OUR MISSION, AND SO--
HERE WE ARE.
DEREN KNEW YOU WERE -
SHE LET ME
WHY?
WHO *ARE* YOU?
SEPHIE, DID YOUR FATHER NEVER MENTION THE PEOPLE OF *ANHEIM?*
HE WOULDN'T HAVE KNOWN THESE YOUNG MEN, BUT SURELY HE MADE MENTION OF MERIME OR ME--
--ALDUR?
I'M SORRY, BUT NO.
HE NEVER DID.
THEN LET'S START OVER.
SEPHIE, WE ARE EMISSARIES OF THE SECRET CITY BELOW. WE'D LIKE TO TAKE YOU TO MEET WITH OUR MINISTER GERES.
YOU HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR FROM US--
-AND CLEARLY YOU COULD PROTECT YOURSELF IF YOU DID--
--BUT BOTH SIDES MAY HAVE SOMETHING TO GAIN.
GENTLEMEN, I'D BE HAPPY TO MEET WITH YOUR MINISTER.
BUT NOT WITHOUT MY FRIENDS.
PLEASE GET THEM.

ANHEIM'S SECRECY HAS BEEN CAREFULLY PROTECTED FOR *CENTURIES*
WE RUN THE UPPER CAVERNS, SOME OF US--
VOLUNTEERS TAKE SHIFTS MANNING THE MAJOR BUSINESSES, GATHERING NEWS AND WHAT SUPPLIES WE CAN'T PRODUCE FOR OURSELVES.
WHILE THE OTHERS RUN THE *DUNGEONS* WHERE THEY HIDE THE *GULLIBLE* ONES WHO POKE AROUND INTO OTHER PEOPLE'S SECRETS AND END UP *ROTTING* AWAY IN
WE HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR COTSON
I'D BE A LITTLE MORE COMFORTABLE HEARING YOU SAY THAT WHERE I COULD SEE THE STARS SEPH
THAT'S RIGHT HOW DO YOU LIVE DOWN HERE WITHOUT LIGHT, CEREG?
THAT'S ONE OF ANHEIM'S SECRETS YOU'LL SEE WHEN WE ARRIVE
YOUR VISIT IS A RARE EVENT-- VERY FEW PEOPLE ARE ALLOWED TO KNOW WHAT'S BELOW BECAUSE OF THE TREASURE PROTECTED THERE
TREASURE?
NOT GOLD OR JEWELS.
OUR WEALTH IS NOT JUST WHAT THE CAVERNS HOLD NOW

BUT WHAT THEY ONCE HELD

IS--

IT'S ANCIENT!

YES, AS FAR AS WE CAN DETERMINE, ANHEIM IS THE ONLY PRE-CATACLYSM CITY TO SURVIVE IN ANY FORM

AS HER DESCENDANTS, WE ARE DEDICATED TO HER PROTECTION AND REVIVAL BECAUSE THE GARDENS PRESERVED HERE COULD BE THE KEY TO STOPPING THE DECAY OF ALL DEMETRIA!

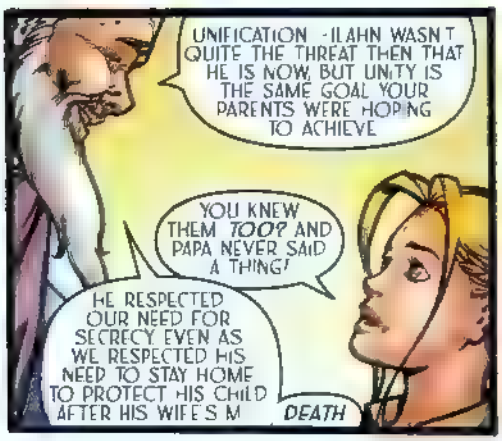
Looking out over structures older than the original huts of Meridian wasn't half as surprising as what I suddenly noticed

the QUIET!

No wind, no crashing waves, no fighting-- the valley below was so STILL

Yet, so ALIVE!

WELCOME TO ANHEIM, MINISTER OF MERIDIAN!
YOU MUST BE MINISTER GERES?
I AM, AND I NEED NO INTRODUCTION TO RECOGNIZE IDERIAS CHILD!
I EXPECTED *YOUR* ARRIVAL-- WHO HAVE YOU BROUGHT WITH YOU?
PEOPLE OF THE LOGGING CAMPS WHO HAVE JOINED ME TO UNITE ANYONE I CAN CONVINCE AGAINST ILAHN OF CADADOR
MAY I PRESENT MY FRIENDS HONDELL DANEYN, AND COTSON


UNIFICATION - ILAHN WASN'T QUITE THE THREAT THEN THAT HE IS NOW, BUT UNITY IS THE SAME GOAL YOUR PARENTS WERE HOPING TO ACHIEVE
YOU KNEW THEM *TOO?* AND PAPA NEVER SAID A THING!
HE RESPECTED OUR NEED FOR SECRECY EVEN AS WE RESPECTED HIS NEED TO STAY HOME TO PROTECT HIS CHILD AFTER HIS WIFE'S M
DEATH

THEY MADE MANY VISITS HERE SEPHIE
WE VALUED THEM BOTH VERY HIGHLY--

AND I AM PLEASED TO SEE THEM BOTH IN YOU
I WAS SORRY TO HEAR THAT TUROS HAD GONE TO JOIN YOUR MOTHER HE AND IDERIA WERE BOTH NSTRUMENTAL TO THE IMPORTANT WORK WE DO HERE
AS WILL BE THE DAUGHTER OF MERIDIAN
WHA ?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
THE EYES SEE ALL SECRETS
WHAT YOU KNEW NOT YOU NEEDED TO KNOW
I SAW YOU HERE AND NOW YOU HAVE COME
I WAS PLANNING TO DO THE HONORS, BUT I SEE THAT YOU AND THE MUSE OF GAIAN HAVE ALREADY MET
NOT REALLY
SHE WAS
SHE WAS HELPING MY UNCLE LAHN
GUIDING, CHILD
ONE SIDE CANNOT GROW WITHOUT THE OTHER
AND THUS THE CIRCLE CONSUMES ITS TAIL, SO BEGINNING
TAKE THIS, CHILD

CAREFUL, SEPHIE

IF SHE'S WITH ILAHN

LET PAST MEET FUTURE DAUGHTER KNOW MOTHER, THE SACRIFICE BE PAID

IT'S ALL RIGHT, YOU TWO --

--I THINK I KNOW WHAT THIS IS...

IT'S *HERS*, ISN'T IT?

MY *MOTHER'S* ART

IDERIA LEFT THESE HERE IN OUR SAFEKEEPING KNOWING YOU WOULD COME

NURSEBLOSSOMS

THESE GREW OUTSIDE MY HOUSE IN MER'DIAN!

AND THANKS TO IDERIA, THEY GROW HERE

Ideria!

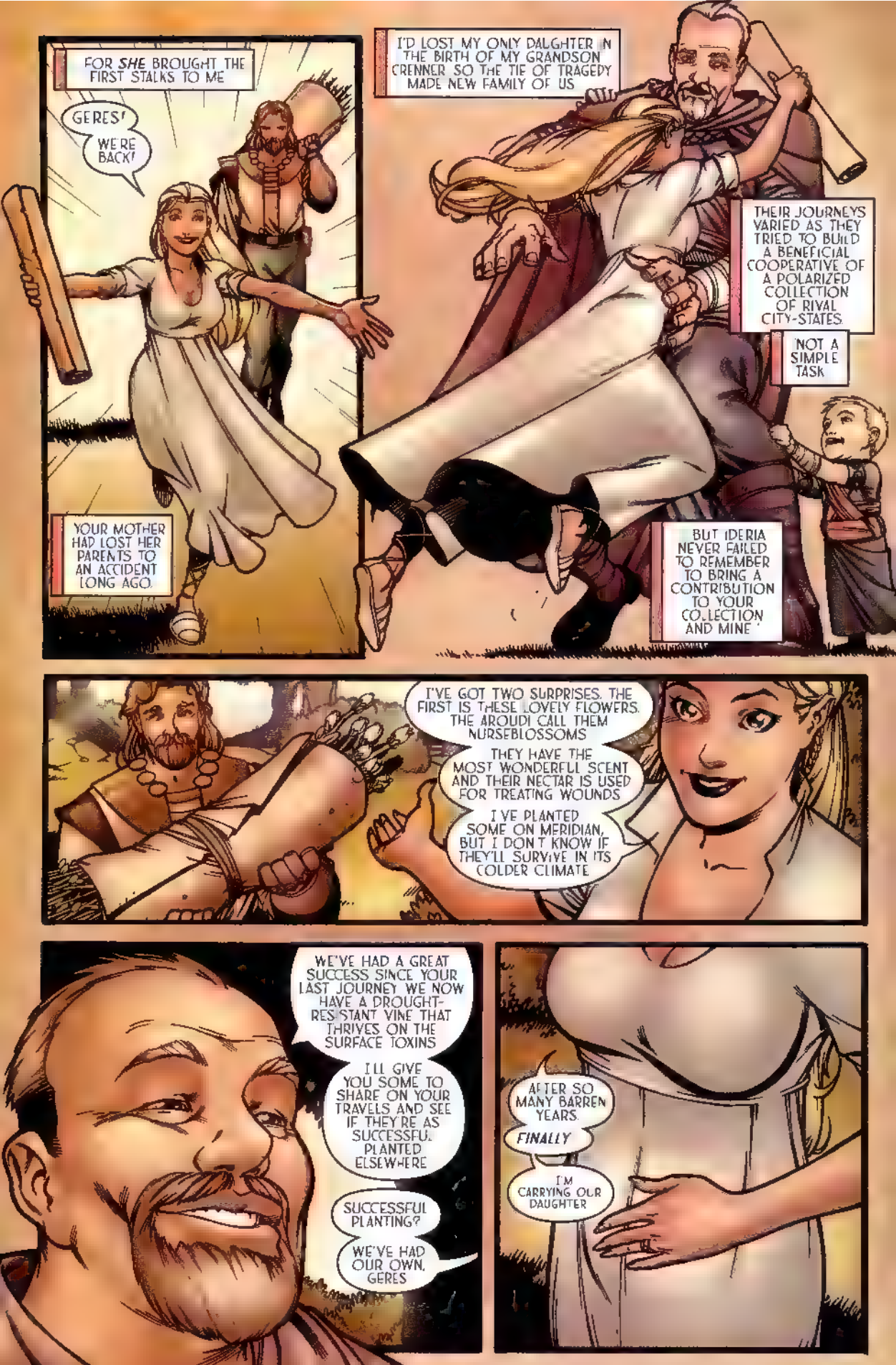
It was startling to think of her --

--of Papa--

--as travelers to distant lands

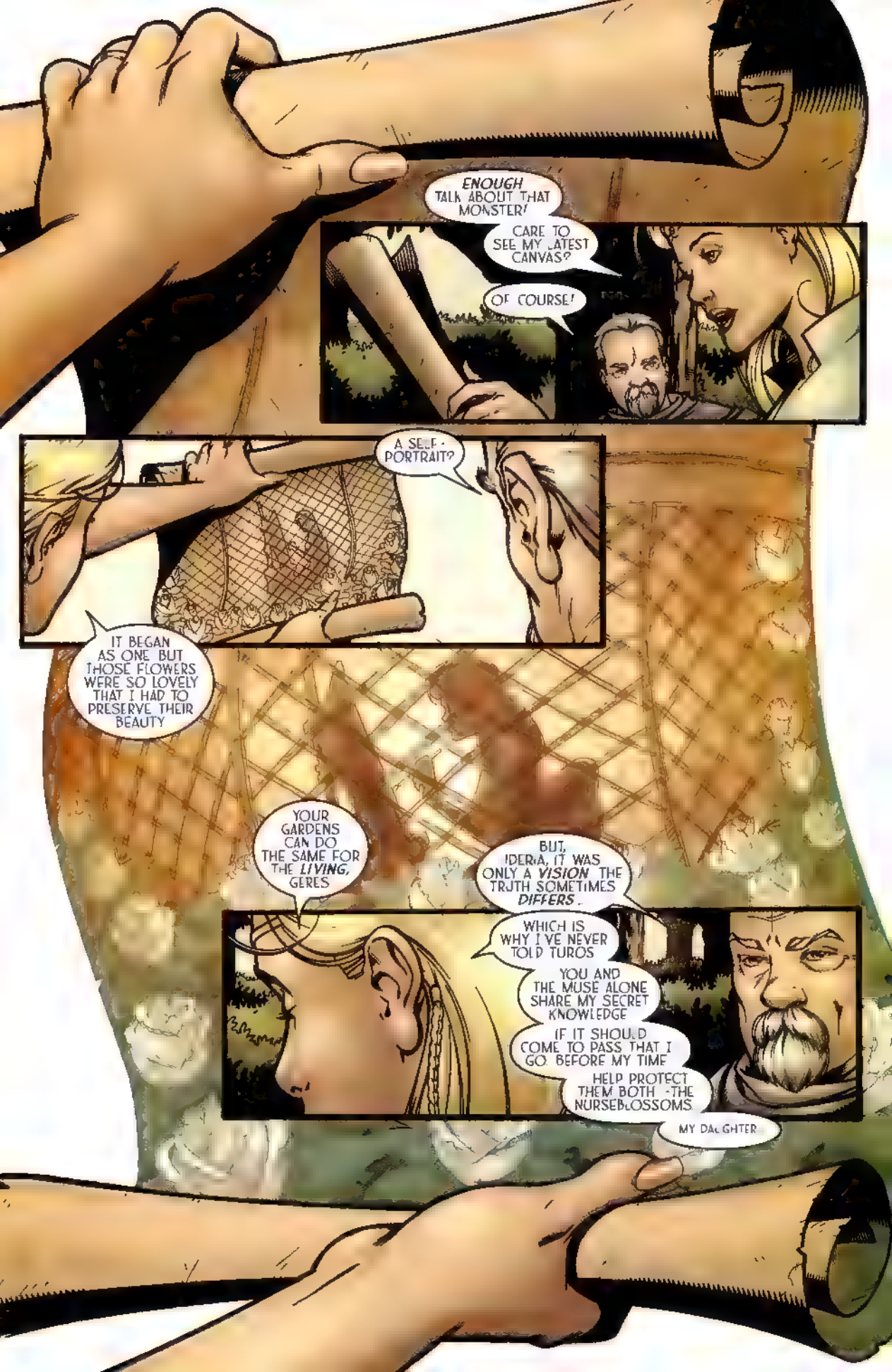
Yet here was evidence that my mother--Ideria--was alive before she went to shine with the stars

I know her only as a memory others have shared with me


FOR SHE BROUGHT THE FIRST STALKS TO ME
GERES! WE'RE BACK!
YOUR MOTHER HAD LOST HER PARENTS TO AN ACCIDENT LONG AGO.
I'D LOST MY ONLY DAUGHTER IN THE BIRTH OF MY GRANDSON CRENNER SO THE TIE OF TRAGEDY MADE NEW FAMILY OF US
THEIR JOURNEYS VARIED AS THEY TRIED TO BUILD A BENEFICIAL COOPERATIVE OF A POLARIZED COLLECTION OF RIVAL CITY-STATES.
NOT A SIMPLE TASK
BUT IDERIA NEVER FAILED TO REMEMBER TO BRING A CONTRIBUTION TO YOUR COLLECTION AND MINE
I'VE GOT TWO SURPRISES. THE FIRST IS THESE LOVELY FLOWERS. THE AROUDI CALL THEM NURSEBLOSSOMS
THEY HAVE THE MOST WONDERFUL SCENT AND THEIR NECTAR IS USED FOR TREATING WOUNDS
I'VE PLANTED SOME ON MERIDIAN, BUT I DON'T KNOW IF THEY'LL SURVIVE IN ITS COLDER CLIMATE
WE'VE HAD A GREAT SUCCESS SINCE YOUR LAST JOURNEY WE NOW HAVE A DROUGHT-RESISTANT VINE THAT THRIVES ON THE SURFACE TOXINS
I'LL GIVE YOU SOME TO SHARE ON YOUR TRAVELS AND SEE IF THEY'RE AS SUCCESSFUL PLANTED ELSEWHERE
SUCCESSFUL PLANTING?
WE'VE HAD OUR OWN, GERES
AFTER SO MANY BARREN YEARS
FINALLY
I'M CARRYING OUR DAUGHTER

AYAHAAHAA!
HEAR THAT, CRENNER?
WHEN YOU GROW UP, YOU CAN MARRY MY LITTLE GIRL!
IT'S NOT BORN YET, TUROS. YOU MIGHT HAVE A SON!
TRUE
MIGHT
AND IF SHE'S HALF AS BEAUTIFUL AS HER MOTHER YOU'LL BE SO LUCKY!
UHH?
SO, GERES, THIS WILL BE MY LAST TRIP TO ANHEIM UNTIL AFTER THE BABY IS BORN
THAT'S UNDERSTANDABLE AND COMPLETELY RIGHT
YOUR DUTIES MUST TURN MORE PERSONAL THAN POLITICAL NOW

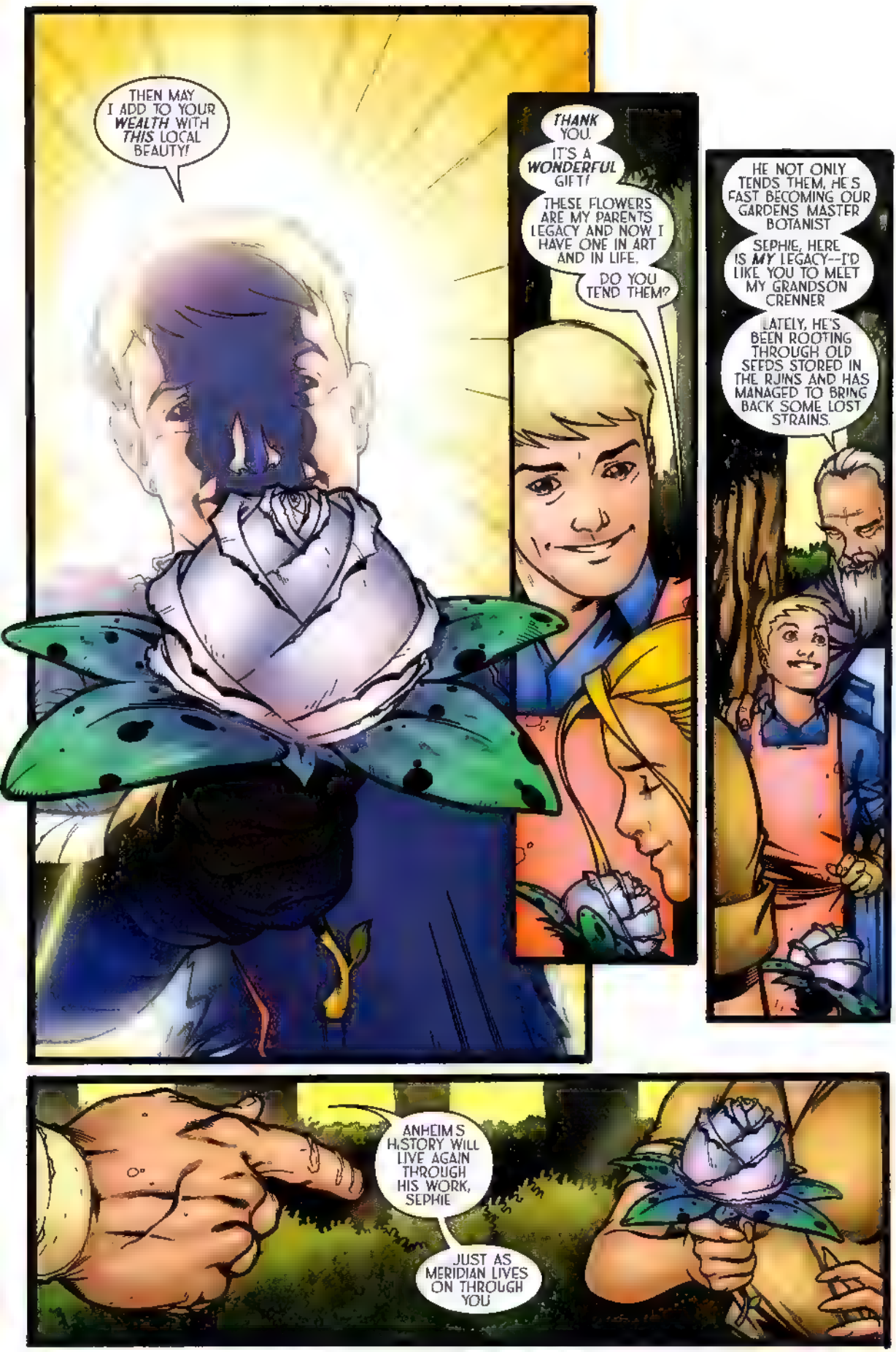
I'LL MISS YOU, BUT IT'S TIME FOR YOU TWO TO REST AWHILE
THANKS TO YOUR YEARS OF WORK WE'VE MADE GREAT PROGRESS IN OUR GARDENS.
WE THINK WE'VE ACTUALLY BEGUN TO *HALT* THE DEGRADATION OF DEMETRIA
BY YOUR DAUGHTER'S TIME, WE MAY HAVE BEGUN ITS *HEALING*
WE MAY EVEN BE ABLE TO DO OUR WORK *OPENLY*
I'D BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT THAT
YOU KNOW TUROS' BROTHER IS *MINISTER* OF CADADOR NOW, WITH EUDORICE AND CLAIRESSA DEAD?
DO YOU KNOW HOW MUCH POWER HE'S GAINED, AND WHAT HE WOULD DO IF HE KNEW ANHEIM EXISTED?
HE'D WANT TO CONTROL, CONTRACT, AND TAX WHAT YOU'RE DOING HERE
YOU DON'T TRUST ILAHN?
I HATE TO SPEAK ILL OF ANYONE, BUT DEATH SEEMS TO FAVOR HIS PLANS
ILAHN WANTED ME, GERES, BUT IT WAS TUROS I LOVED
THANK THE STARS ILAHN'S NEVER CONSIDERED TUROS AN IMPEDIMENT TO HIS POWER-HUNGRY SCHEMES
I COULDN'T BEAR IT IF --
IF


ENOUGH TALK ABOUT THAT MONSTER!
CARE TO SEE MY LATEST CANVAS?
OF COURSE!
A SELF-PORTRAIT?
IT BEGAN AS ONE BUT THOSE FLOWERS WERE SO LOVELY THAT I HAD TO PRESERVE THEIR BEAUTY
YOUR GARDENS CAN DO THE SAME FOR THE LIVING, GERES
BUT, IDERIA, IT WAS ONLY A VISION THE TRUTH SOMETIMES DIFFERS..
WHICH IS WHY I'VE NEVER TOLD TUROS
YOU AND THE MUSE ALONE SHARE MY SECRET KNOWLEDGE
IF IT SHOULD COME TO PASS THAT I GO BEFORE MY TIME
HELP PROTECT THEM BOTH -THE NURSEBLOSSOMS
MY DAUGHTER...

--LET SOME PART OF ME BE PART OF DEMETRIA'S HEALING

I'VE ALWAYS LOVED NURSEBLOSSOMS, BUT I'VE NEVER SEEN ANY SO

RASE!
WHO'S THAT-?
HEALTHY
CRENNER TOO MUCH TIME SNIFFING THE FLOWERS AND NOT ENOUGH PAYING ATTENTION TO THE NEWS!
THAT'S HER!
TUROS AND IDERIAS DAUGHTER
THE FLYING ONE FROM MERIDIAN?
THAT'S THE MINISTER OF MERIDIAN?
IT IS HEALTHIER
WE'VE WORKED TIRELESSLY TO ENHANCE THE PLANT'S HEALING PROPERTIES
WE EXPORT THE NECTAR THROUGH AN AGENT IN BASAN YOU MAY KNOW THE FINAL PRODUCT ALREADY
BASANTY SALVE? THAT'S REALLY JUST NURSEBLOSSOM NECTAR?
BASIC BUSINESS, MINISTER SEPHIE
I KNOW, I KNOW IT'S ALL IN THE SHOWING
PRESENT YOUR LOCAL GIFTS AS GOLD


THEN MAY I ADD TO YOUR *WEALTH* WITH *THIS* LOCAL BEAUTY!
THANK YOU.
IT'S A *WONDERFUL* GIFT!
THESE FLOWERS ARE MY PARENTS LEGACY AND NOW I HAVE ONE IN ART AND IN LIFE.
DO YOU TEND THEM?
HE NOT ONLY TENDS THEM, HE'S FAST BECOMING OUR GARDENS MASTER BOTANIST
SEPHIE, HERE IS *MY* LEGACY--I'D LIKE YOU TO MEET MY GRANDSON CRENNER
LATELY, HE'S BEEN ROOTING THROUGH OLD SEEDS STORED IN THE RUINS AND HAS MANAGED TO BRING BACK SOME LOST STRAINS.
ANHEIM'S HISTORY WILL LIVE AGAIN THROUGH HIS WORK, SEPHIE
JUST AS MERIDIAN LIVES ON THROUGH YOU

THIS RADIANT HOME THAT IS FAR FROM CADADOR
THIS *ELYSIA* YOU HAIL FROM
NO MATTER HOW FAR FROM HOME YOU TRAVEL
BOTH OF YOU CARRY THE CITY OF YOUR BIRTH CLOSE TO YOUR HEARTS

COULD ONE PLOT T ON A MAP?
MINISTER ILAHN, LADY REESHA --
AS THE STARS ARE TO YOUR EYES, SO IS ELYSIA TO DEMETRIA TOO FAR REMOVED FOR YOUR MAP
THEN HOW DID YOU COME TO BE HERE?
YOU MUST HAVE SOME FORM OF TRAVEL --
-- LIKE A BIRD!
--THAT BRINGS YOU FROM THIS STAR-DISTANT HOME OF YOURS!
TAKE ME THERE RHO I WANT TO SEE THIS CITY YOU SAY DWARFS MY OWN
ILAHN, I CAN'T JUST SHOW UP ON THE GRAND PLAZA WITH STRANGERS!
INGRA WILL HAVE MY --
SO YOU HAVE THOSE YOU ANSWER TO?
YOU ARE MERELY THEIR AGENT?
SCOOT WILL YOU LOROS?
I CAN'T SEE
EEEE
I DON'T ANSWER TO --!
IT'S JUST THAT --!
IT'S NOT LIKE THAT AT ALL!
YET IT IS.
IF YOU CAN'T INVITE VISITORS TO YOUR HOME WITHOUT THEIR PERMISSION, THEN YOU ARE --
I AM OF THE FIRST!
I CAN DO WHATEVER I WISH!

THEN SHOW ME HOW YOU TRAVEL TO
MINISTER LAHN?
MINISTER LAHN
YOU HAVEN'T JUST
DISAPPEARED?

-ELYSIA
VERY GOOD!
I KNEW I'D WEAR HIM DOWN
NOW, IF YOU'LL DELIVER ME TO YOUR MASTERS, RHO RHUSTANE
MINISTER ILAHN
THAT MIGHT NOT BE HIS NAME IN THIS FORM
HNNH?
OH

WELCOME TO ELYSIA, MINISTER OF CADADOR
THIS IS WHERE WE GO ABOUT OUR BUSINESS
THIS CHAOS?
YOU OBVIOUSLY SOUGHT ME OUT FOR MY PROFESSIONAL ADVICE
INTRODUCTIONS, RHO
SHALL WE BEGIN?
Somewhere out there, I knew Uncle Iiahn was plotting against Meridian
It was comforting to be in the presence of secret allies and know he didn't share that advantage
Now all I needed was enough time.

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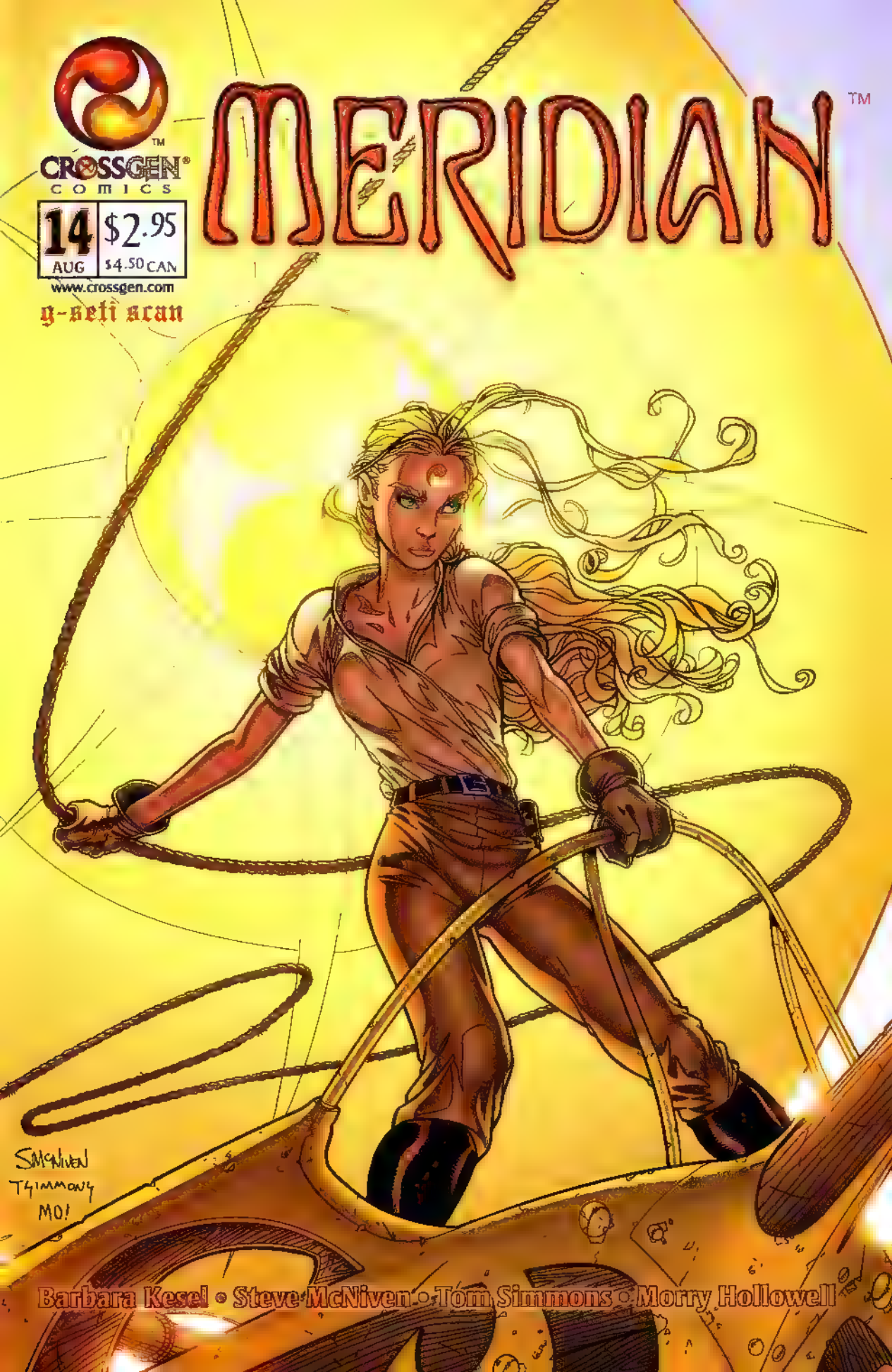
Sepiie's floating island home, Meridian, penciled and colored by Morry Hollowell with inks by Tom Simmons.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Sephie is rallying support to oppose Ilahn, a quest that takes her, accompanied by a trio of loggers, down into the mysterious region known only as the Caverns. There she encounters **Deren Beq** before being shown to the secret lower caverns where she meets the Muse of Giatan and receives her legacy: drawings her mother left for her, and the story of the unity her parents sought to bring about between ground-dwellers and sky people.

Meanwhile, Ilahn and Reesha have been transported to Elysia, the home of their ally Rho Rhustane...

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EMBO...!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
KILLING IT BEFORE IT CAN KILL US!
INGRA SAID WE WERE TO *OBSERVE* THE SIGIL-BEARERS, *NOT* ATTACK!
I DON'T CARE!
I'D RATHER RISK HER WRATH THAN DEATH AT THIS STRANGER'S TOUCH!
EMBO...! *NO!*
IF YOU HAVEN'T KILLED IT, IT WILL BE *ANGRY* NOW
YOU NEED TO LEARN WHEN TO BE FORCEFUL, CHYIA. THE SURVIVORS ARE THOSE WHO KNOW WHEN TO STRIKE FIRST!

THIS IS HARDLY THE WAY TO NEGOTIATE
I NEED UNH -- TO KEEP CONTROL
YOU PEOPLE - HNH! -- NEED A LESSON IN THE COURTESIES OF EXCHANGE
I SEE MY TASK CLEARLY

I AM TO BE YOUR ADVISOR IN THE WAYS OF WILL!
I CANNOT BE KILLED BECAUSE I WILL NOT ALLOW IT!
SEE HOW I DESTROY MY DEATH!
THE ENERGY HERE
AAAAAH!
IT'S
SO
SO
-- PURE!
HOW CAN HE ?
STEAL POWER FROM US?
THEY CAN DO THAT
I ASSUMED, WITH ALL OF US, THERE'D BE NO TROUBLE RESTRAINING HIM, BUT
SO, RHO RHUSTANE -- YOU PLANNED TO BRING MINISTER LAHN TO YOUR WORLD ALL ALONG
WHAT IS THIS SUBSTANCE HE'S ABLE TO FEED ON?
WHY CAN'T I?

YOUR GIFT COMES FROM ME, REESHA NOT FROM TAPPING THE UNIVERSAL ENERGIES
ONLY I CAN BESTOW YOUR FIRE
AND I NEVER PLANNED
PLAN?
YOU DIDN'T PLAN!
YOU DIDN'T THINK!
YOU'RE ALWAYS DOING THIS RHORE! ALWAYS RUNNING OFF HALF COCKED, GETTING EVERYBODY ALL EXCITED!
NOW LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE!
IF ONLY YOU'D THINKGGGKK
EGYUUURK!
NOW WOULD BE A GOOD TIME TO UNHAND ME ENTUGRO!
NOW?
REESHA STAND CLEAR!
I MAY NEED TO RETRIEVE THAT WHICH I GAVE YOU TO URK! SURVIVE THIS!

IT'S GOOD
GOOD
NO.
THIS HUNGER ADDICTION...
I WILL NOT SLIP AGAIN
I WILL NOT BE
.. CONTROLLED
ARE FILLING ME WITH LIMITLESS POWER
WITH THIS HERE I CAN SURPASS GODS!

NO CRAVING
NO POWER
WILL BE
...MY MASTER!
Ah
BETTER
ELYSIA S A FASC.NATING P.ACE, RHO RHUSTANE
GET UP
I BELIEVE YOU AND I HAVE MUCH TO DISCUSS

I LIKE WHY YOU SEEM SO DETERMINED TO *PUSH* ME THIS WAY
I DO THANK YOU FOR SEEING THAT I GOT THIS GIFT FROM MY MOTHER, BUT
WHY ARE YOU *HERE?*
I WILL COME WHEN NEEDED, IN THE FORM MOST FITTING
I AM THE EYES WHO SEE WHAT COMES AND I MUST MAKE YOU READY
READY FOR WHAT?
WHEN THE TWO SIDES MUST JOIN AS ONE AGAINST THE REVERSAL AND ENDING
WHA--?
YOU DON'T MEAN I'LL BE WORK NG *WITH* UNCLE ALAHN?
The Muse of Giatan is a very strange creature
As surprising as it was to find her suddenly gone, it had been more so to discover HER in the secret caverns of Anheim bearing a case of my mother's artwork and stories of knowing her
WHY?
There was clearly some greater mystery involved
MUSE ?
I'm not certain I'll ever know her true purpose

and I'm not sure it matters
I did want to ask her more questions that night, but with what I'd learned about what my parents had done there
my head already held enough
Time to let thoughts rest and sort themselves out
I was in a place of ancient mysteries that held new secrets
AND being followed by someone who'd never trailed shy deer through the woods
If I'd learned not to be taken by surprise
I'd also learned
to be the surprise!
YAAAH!

CRENNER!
SEPHIE!
OH!
I DIDN'T MEAN TO BE FOLLOWING YOU
WHO DID YOU THINK I WAS?
I... I SAW THE LIGHT AT THE STOREHOUSE AND--
SINCE THERE ARE STRANGERS IN ANHEIM--
--NOT THAT I THINK ANY OF YOU WOULD--
THE STOREHOUSE IS MY RESPONSIBILITY I COULDN'T JUST ASSUME WHOEVER WAS UP HERE HAD GOOD INTENTIONS
WHAT WE HAVE HERE ISN'T VALUABLE IN THE USUAL SENSE, BUT IT'S IRREPLACEABLE
WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT?
THAT WOULD BE NICE
YOU MIGHT THINK IT'S JUST SEEDS, BUT SOMEONE FROM LONG AGO GATHERED AND STORED A SAMPLE OF EVERYTHING THAT GROWS ON DEMETRIA!
I'VE BEEN WORKING MY WAY THROUGH CHECKING FOR VIABILITY, NOT ONLY TO BRING STRAINS BACK
I HOPE THIS DOESN'T SOUND STUPID
BUT TO HONOR THE PERSON WHO WORKED SO HARD TO SAVE THEM
THAT'S NOT STUPID THAT'S THOUGHTFUL.
SOME ARE RUINED, LIKE THESE--
--LOST FOR ALL TIME BECAUSE OF A FAULTY SEAL.

WAIT

MAYBE NOT FOR *ALL* TIME!

HERE YOU ARE
SEPHIE!
WHAT *ARE* YOU!
HOW COULD YOU...?
LET ME REPHRASE THAT WHAT YOU *ARE* IS WONDERFUL
THANK YOU YOU'VE JUST DONE A MIRACULOUS THING
HAVE YOU ALWAYS BEEN SO SPECIAL?
I'M STILL LEARNING WHAT I CAN DO
MY ABILITY TO FIX THINGS COMES FROM THE MARK ON MY HEAD
IT'S ALL HAPPENING SO QUICKLY
TOO QUICKLY, CRENNER
I'M SORRY BUT THERE'S SOMEONE BACK HOME ON MERIDIAN
HIS NAME IS *JAD*

KZZZZT
KZZZZT
KZZZZT
KRAAAH
WHOOM
KRASHOOM
SHOOM
JAD NO!
IT'S TIME TO TAKE COVER!
BUT THE SHIP!

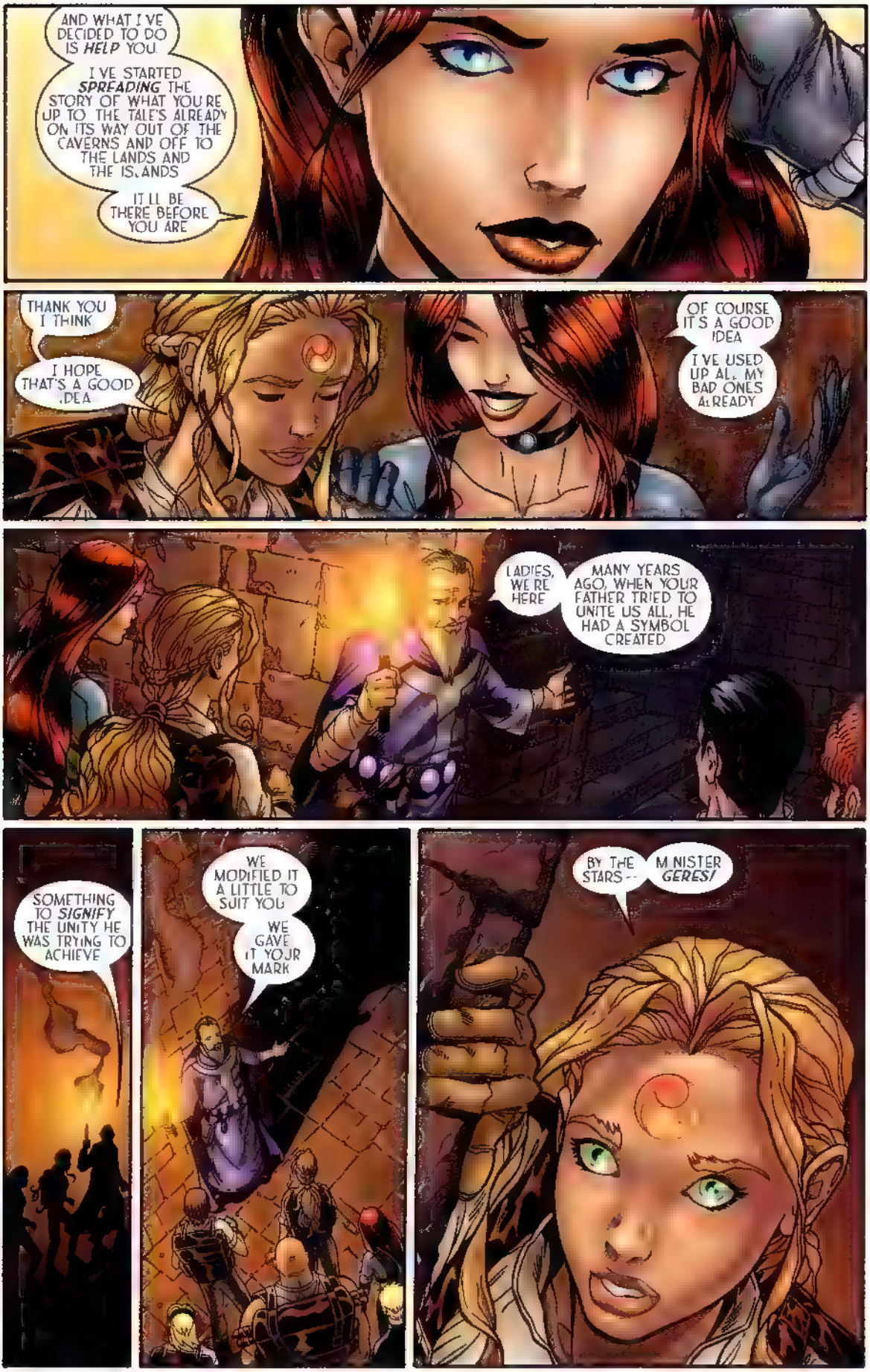
IT ISN'T WORTH YOUR LIFE! NO THING IS!
KRA KA BOOM

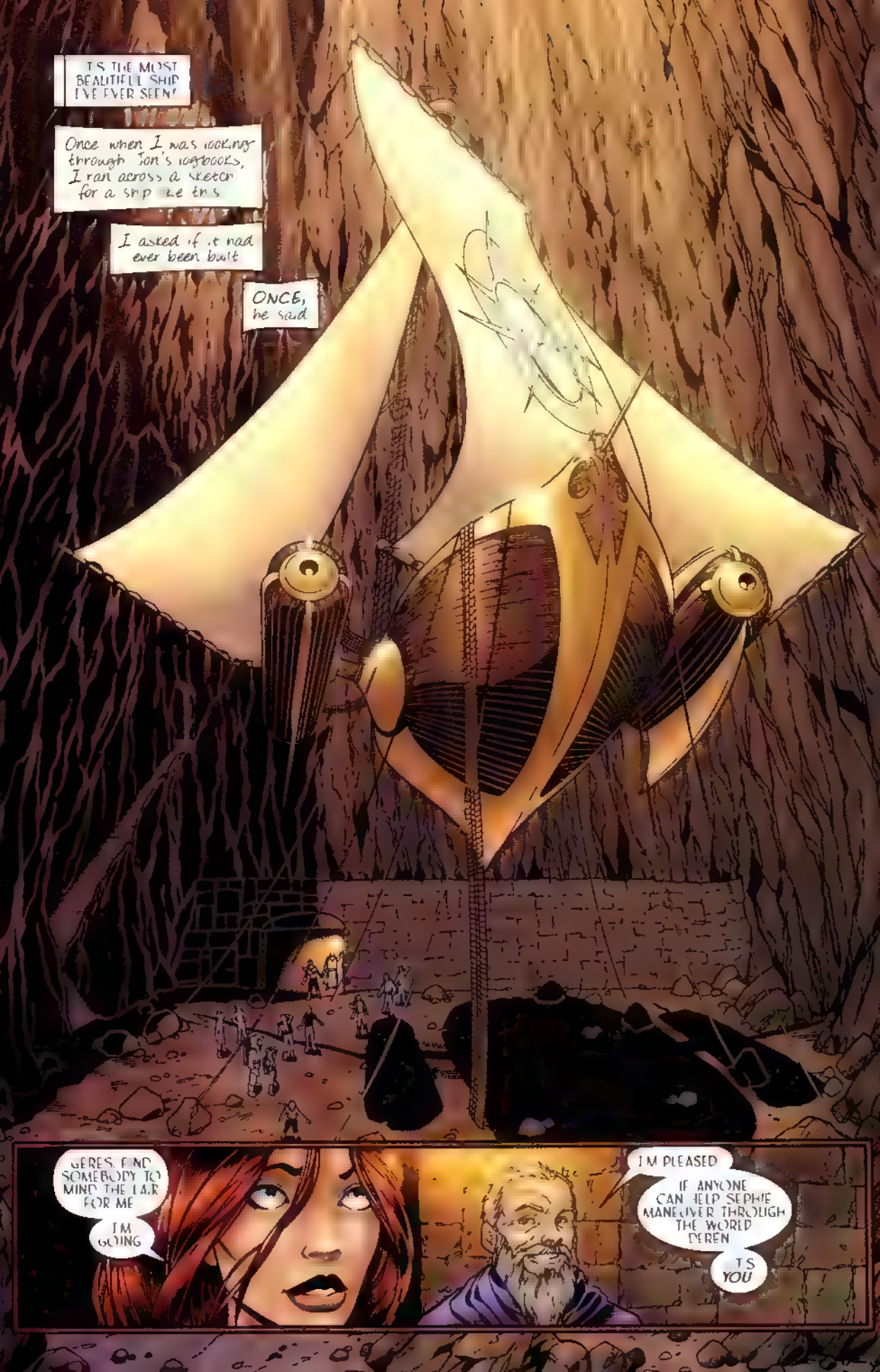
KRAAAAKK
THAT WAS CLOSE
SOMETHING WE HAVE TO LEARN TO LIVE WITH HERE, MEIER
DAD WHAT'S THAT?
I DON'T KNOW, SON
IN ALL MY YEARS THAT'S A PHENOMENON I'VE NEVER SEEN
BUT
INSIDE
CAN YOU SEE ?
IT'S NOT JUST A FREAK OF THE WEATHER IT'S IT'S A PERSON!'

WOOOSH
AOW!
YEOWTCH!
PEOPLE OF MERIDIAN!
YET NOT, FOR YOU JOURNEYED HERE.
THE EYES LOOKED FARTHER TO SEE YOU THAN THE ISLAND OF THE MINISTER'S BIRTH, ALL THE WAY TO THIS STORM-PLAGUED ROCK
BUT THE WINDS OF MY SEEING SWIRL BOTH FAIR AND FOUL
I AM THE MUSE OF GIATAN. I AM THE EYES AND MY GAZE HAS FALLEN ON ONE OF YOUR OWN

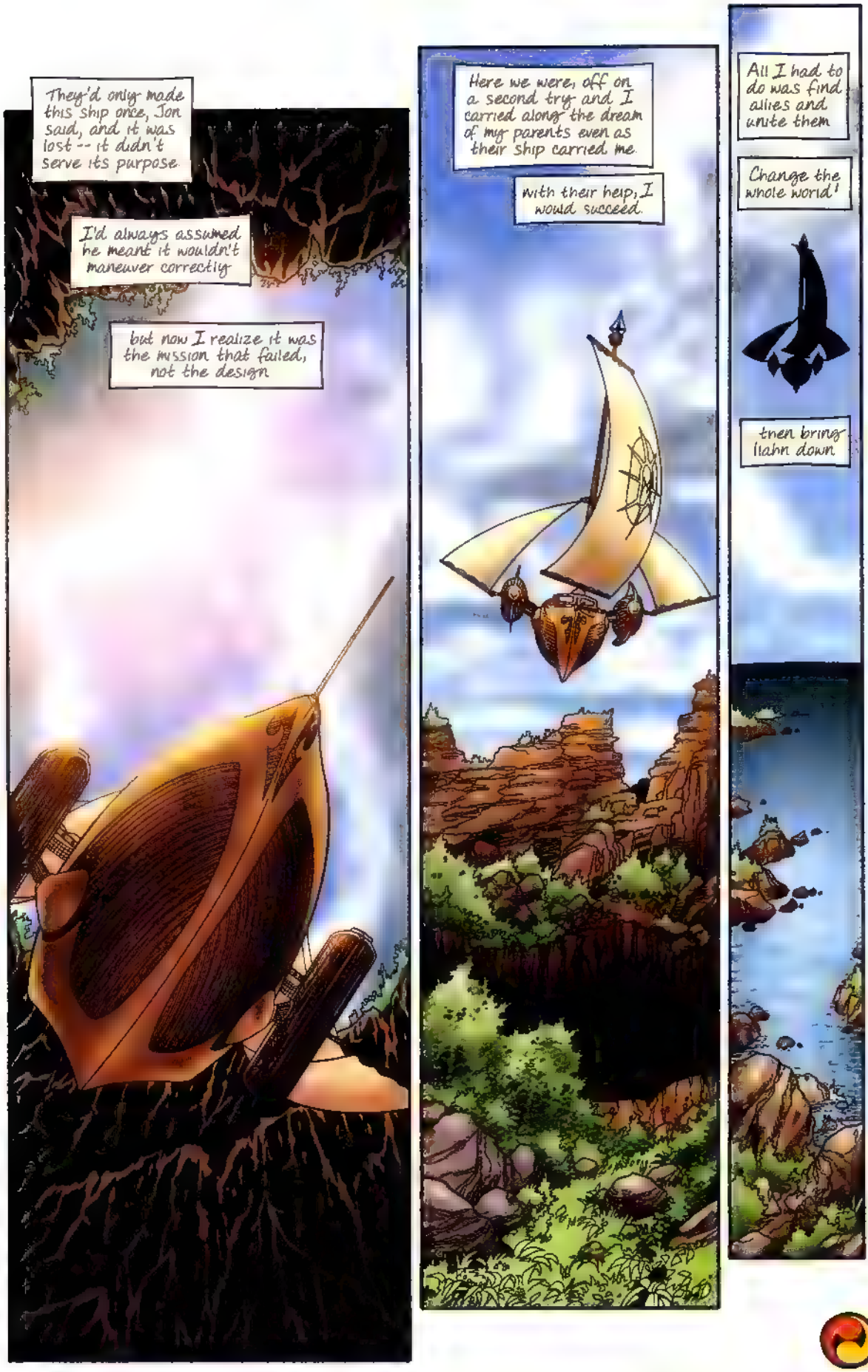
I NEVER THOUGHT I'D SEE THE DAY *DEREN BEQ* WOULD COME OUT OF HER LAIR AND JOURNEY DOWN TO ANHEIM WITH US.
I'M GLAD YOU CHANGED YOUR MIND ABOUT US, DEREN
NEXT THING WE KNOW, YOU'LL BE TENDING THE GARDENS -- *BEATING* THE CROPS INTO BLOOM!
FUNNY MAN, CEREG
YOU AND DREN CAN COME WORK THE LAIR'S CROWD SOMETIME
I HAVEN'T CHANGED A THING
I STILL DON'T WANT TO BE A PART OF THE HOLIER-THAN-THOU MISS ON THAT CONSUMES YOUR LIVES DOWN HERE
BUT I'VE GOT SOMETHING I'VE GOT TO MAKE RIGHT
I MISUSED SEPHIE AND I NEED TO APOLOGIZE.
THEN I CAN GET BACK TO MINDING MY OWN BUSINESS

SEPHIE, ALTHOUGH I REGRET YOU ARE LEAVING US SO SOON, WE HAVE SOMETH NG WE'D LIKE YOU TO TAKE WITH YOU ON YOUR JOURNEY
BESIDES ME
I MEAN, I WANT TO COME WITH YOU
IF IT'S ALL RIGHT WITH MINISTER GERES, OF COURSE
WHICH MEANS I HAVE TO GO TO KEEP YOU OUT OF TROUBLE OR YOUR GRANDPA WILL MULCH ME INTO THE GARDENS
I HAVE NO IDEA IF I'LL BE SUCCESSFUL IN CONVINCING ANY OF THE CITIES TO OPENLY DEFY LAHN --
YOU WILL
JUST PULL A STUNT LIKE YOU DID OUTSIDE THE LAIR
YOU?
ONCE THEY SEE YOU FLY AND TOSS THEM LIKE CUSHIONS, THEY'LL DO ANYTHING YOU ASK
YOU--
YOU!
YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO HAVE THEM KIDNAP ME!
YOU COULD HAVE JUST ASKED
GROW UP
I DON'T ASK
I DECIDE


AND WHAT I'VE DECIDED TO DO IS *HELP* YOU.
I'VE STARTED *SPREADING* THE STORY OF WHAT YOU'RE UP TO. THE TALE'S ALREADY ON ITS WAY OUT OF THE CAVERNS AND OFF TO THE LANDS AND THE ISLANDS
IT'LL BE THERE BEFORE YOU ARE
THANK YOU. I THINK
I HOPE THAT'S A GOOD IDEA
OF COURSE IT'S A GOOD IDEA
I'VE USED UP ALL MY BAD ONES ALREADY
LADIES, WE'RE HERE
MANY YEARS AGO, WHEN YOUR FATHER TRIED TO UNITE US ALL, HE HAD A SYMBOL CREATED
SOMETHING TO *SIGNIFY* THE UNITY HE WAS TRYING TO ACHIEVE
WE MODIFIED IT A LITTLE TO SUIT YOU
WE GAVE IT YOUR MARK
BY THE STARS--
MINISTER *GERES!*


T'S THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SHIP I'VE EVER SEEN!
Once when I was looking through Jon's logbooks, I ran across a sketch for a ship like this
I asked if it had ever been built
ONCE, he said
GERES, FIND SOMEBODY TO MIND THE LAIR FOR ME
I'M GOING
I'M PLEASED
IF ANYONE CAN HELP SEPHIE MANEUVER THROUGH THE WORLD DEREN
T'S YOU

YOU HAVE OUR BEST WISHES, MINISTER OF MERIDIAN AND MY GRANDSON'S ADDITION TO YOUR CAUSE IS PROOF OF OUR SUPPORT
SHOULD YOU NEED ANYTHING MORE
YOU'VE DONE MORE THAN ENOUGH MINISTER GERES
NOW IT'S MY TURN
WHATEVER GAVE ME THIS SIGIL MADE ME THE ONE PERSON WHO CAN STOP MY UNCLE
THAT'S WHAT I HAVE TO DO
SWIFT WINDS AND GOOD JOURNEY SEPHIE!
THANK YOU!
Less than two weeks ago, I was a little girl who fell from the sky
Now I was Minister of Meridian, Captain of my parents' ship, able to fly, to heal, to fight definitely no longer the same little girl
There was no turning back on this journey


They'd only made this ship once, Jon said, and it was lost -- it didn't serve its purpose.
I'd always assumed he meant it wouldn't maneuver correctly.
but now I realize it was the mission that failed, not the design.
Here we were, off on a second try and I carried along the dream of my parents even as their ship carried me.
With their help, I would succeed.
All I had to do was find allies and unite them.
Change the whole world!
then bring Ilahn down.

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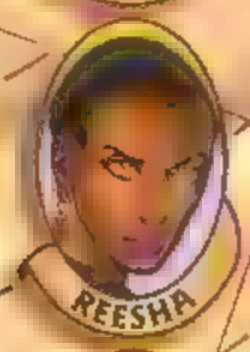

Far away...

on the world of Demetria, explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

One of these islands is **Meridian**, home of shipbuilders and **Sephie**, the daughter of Minister Turos. Sephie's life has been spent being groomed to someday take over the ruling of Meridian. Her uncle **Ilahn** is the Minister of the rich city-state of Cadador, which controls most of the shipping and trade on Demetria.

When a mysterious force endows both brothers with the Sigil, a link to power, Turos (weakened by Ilahn's poisoning) dies, and his sigil is transferred to Sephie.

Ilahn gains the power to speed decay and create destruction. Sephie finds she has the power to force renewal, allowing her to heal, propel herself through the sky, and move things without touching them.

Ilahn tries, and fails, to control Sephie. Now he wants to gain control of all Demetria, beginning with his conquest of the island where he was born: Meridian.

Many of the people of Meridian, including Sephie's best friend **Jad Takarty**, have fled to a new, wild island. Jad's father Jon is the Meridianites' unofficial leader. In the midst of a wild storm, **the Muse** appears to them...

Sephie is rallying support to oppose Ilahn, a quest that takes her, accompanied by a trio of loggers, down into the Caverns. There, she encounters **Deren Beq** before being shown to the secret city of Anheim where she meets the Muse of Giatan and receives her legacy: drawings her mother left for her and the story of the unity her parents sought to bring about between ground-dwellers and sky people. She also meets Crenner, the Minister's grandson, and renews decayed seeds from Anheim's storehouses.

Meanwhile, Ilahn and his newly-powered follower **Reesha** have visited Elysia, the home of their ally **Rho Rhustane**, and Ilahn has discovered he can absorb power from that environment ...but at the cost of his self-control.

I'M RIGHT--

I *KNOW* IT!

BESIDES, IT'LL HAVE TO GET BY *ME* FIRST!

Home on Meridian, people might be finishing their morning chores and getting ready to break for their midday meal

I imagine their lives have changed since the soldiers from Cadador took control of our sistana, but not their routines

Work, eat rest
Work, eat, rest
Sleep

I miss the familiar rhythm of my days there

STAND FIRM AGAINST ALL DANGERS YOUNG ONE

LET YOUR BRAVERY GUIDE YOU ON YOUR HEART'S PATH

FOR THE JOINING OF SOULS MAKES STRONGER THE SIGIL BEARER'S RESOLVE

THE STORM QUELLED TO STILLNESS HERE PALES IN FURY TO THE ONE TO COME

IT *MUST* BE DEFIED

YOU

TAKE FORTH A SMALL VESSEL TO SEEK AND JOIN SHE WHO UNITES EARTH AND SKY

TAD TAKARTY

DID I HEAR THAT RIGHT?

ME?

PEABE DOES SHE MEAN ME?

SHE CAN'T

NO JAD

SHE *WOULDN'T* WANT TO SEND YOU AWAY JUST NOW

I THINK SHE DOES MEAN ME

GO

THE MINISTER OF MERDIAN NEEDS YOU

BUT SHE'S

SEPHIES

DEAD

SHE LIVES.

SEE.

SEPHIE

SHE'S ALIVE

SEPHIE'S ALIVE!

JAD!

WAIT

I KNOW WE WOULD ALL LOVE FOR THAT TO BE TRUE BUT WE CAN'T JUST TAKE THIS OLD WOMAN'S WORD ON IT!

YOU DON'T JUST *LEAVE* BECAUSE SOME STRANGER TELLS US THIS PIECE OF --uh-- WHAT WE'D LIKE TO HEAR!

BRAVE GIRL

NOT OLD ENOUGH TO REMEMBER

YOU ARE, JON TAKARTY

YOU'RE THE ONE

DAD?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

SHOULD I *DO* THIS?

I KNOW IT SOUNDS STRANGE, BUT I CAN *SEE* WHERE SEPHIE IS

--IT'S *GOT* TO BE REAL!

MADAME, OUR FORMER MINISTER TUROS SPOKE OF SOMEONE LIKE YOU

ARE YOU THE ONE HE MET IN THE CAVERNS?

I AM THE SAME FOREVER AND UNCHANGING

HMMM

GO, JAD. BRING HER BACK TO OUR NEW MERIDIAN

TO *HESPERIA*

IF IT'S TRUE, IF YOU FIND HER

TELL HER THE NEW ISLAND HAS A NAME BUT LACKS A MINISTER

THANKS, MIRA DAD

-- I'LL BRING HER HOME

I'LL BE BACK AS SOON AS I CAN!

DAD?

MAYBE SHE WON'T WANT TO GO ANYWHERE BUT HOME TO *MERIDIAN*

WITH *YOU*

WE'RE GOING TO *MASSINTAK*

IF I'M RIGHT THE FARMERS THERE WILL BE ECONOMICALLY RECEPTIVE TO THE IDEA OF A NEW COALITION FREE OF CADADOR'S TARIFFS

THAT MAKES THE STEP ISLANDS OUR BEST FIRST STOP

...ST STOP ANYWHERE THAT'S NOT MOVING

I'M SO GRATEFUL YOU'RE ALL HERE WITH ME, AND I THINK I KNOW ALL THE REASONS WHY.

SOME OF YOU WERE CONCERNED FOR MY SAFETY

COTSON, DANEYN, HONDELL

SOME OF YOU ARE SHARING ANHEIM'S BOTANICAL DISCOVERIES WITH NEW CITIES

I WISH YOU DIDN'T STILL HAVE TO WORK IN SECRET CEREG, CRENNER RASE

AND SOME OF YOU

FEEL BETTER NOW HONDELL?

HAVE YOUR OWN MOTIVES

ALWAYS

BUT JUST AS WE'RE ALL UNITED HERE, WE CAN JOIN TOGETHER OTHER CITIES INTO A NEW AND BETTER TRADE UNION, AND THIS SYMBOL WILL SERVE TO UNITE US!

BUT THAT'S *YOUR* SYMBOL, SEPHIE

LOOKS BIG ENOUGH TO SHARE TO ME!

WE'LL MAKE IT *OUR* SYMBOL

THEIR SAILS BEAR AN UNREGISTERED MARK

- WHICH MEANS THEY'RE VIOLATING THE PROTECTED TRADE CORRIDORS WITHOUT OBTAINING THE NECESSARY REGISTRATION

YOUR ORDERS, CAPTAIN PATGIEN?

TAKE THEM

FWASHO

WHERE DD ?

SKYFIRE!

TWO SHORT!

BOOOM

WHAT?

THAT MEANS DOWN!

MOVE!

YOU KEEP OUR SHIP SAFE --

-- I'LL KEEP US SAFE

A-HEY, ADADORIAN TRADER!

THE MINISTER OF *MERIDIAN* WANTS YOUR ATTENTION!

SHE'S GOT IT

OH YEAH

THE MINISTER OF MERIDIAN?

YOU?

BUT YOU'RE DEAD

I SAW YOU FALL

I HAD TO BE THE ONE TO TELL HIM

UNCLE LAHN?

S *HE* WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR ARM?

YES...

HE CONSIDERED ME RESPONS BLE

FOR YOUR

ACCIDENT

WHAT S SHE -?

BUT I M NOT DEAD

I M SO SORRY

.ET ME SEE WHAT I CAN DO

KLK

YOU DO HO.D SOME CULPABILITY--

--I *WOULD* HAVE D ED IF NOT FOR THE SIG I I WEAR

BUT I FORGIVE YOU

HERE

MY

ARM ?

GOOD AS NEW!

LET IT BE A MESSAGE BACK TO LAHN TE.L HIM I NTEND TO FIX THINGS

BIGGER THINGS

OHHH !

THAT GRLS GOT TO .EARN TO WATCH HER BACK

CATCH CRENNER!

DEREN!

WHAT ARE YOu DOING?

WHUMP

WHAT I ALWAYS DO -

CLEANING UP

KLEK

KLEK

Maybe I should have known what the soldier was seeing

But how could I have known he'd view my healing of his Captain's arm as an attack?

The bolt only grazed me but the fear cut me to the core

ANNNNH!

ZWWWWWKKT

RRRRPT

SNNNHH

one stilled my heart, the other could have

ONE PROBLEM DOWN

FWOOOSH

ONE TO GO

I detected a flaw in my planning

I hadn't anticipated a HOSTILE reaction

I was thinking too neat

I had to try to think like someone ruthless

QUICKLY

So, turning my original plan back against itself, I formed another

A new trade union would still have to use the same old trade routes

CADADOR controls those

Mann controls trade because he guards the trade routes and the trade ships

but what if he COULDN'T protect them?

What if something-- SOMEBODY-- barred the way?

Not for forever-- it'd just take proving it COULD be done!

Then we wouldn't need to go seeking allies--

--we'd get them to come to us because they'd hear of what we were doing--

--blockading Cadadorian ships!

STOP!

NO MORE SKYFIRE OR I'LL SEND IT BACK TO YOU!

YOU GO HOME AND TELL *THIS* TO YOUR MINISTER!

HE NO LONGER OWNS THE TRADE CORRIDORS!

WE DO!

HIS ATTEMPTS TO REGULATE THEM WILL BE MET WITH RESISTANCE--

--ME!

CAPTAIN PATG EN--

-DO WE ENGAGE?

NO

WE GO HOME

WE HAVE AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO DELIVER

YOU WANTED TO SEE MY HOME MINISTER I'AHN

AND I HAVE OBLIGED

BEFORE I GET ON WITH MY EXILE HERE, DO YOU HAVE ANY *OTHER* REQUESTS OF ME?

YES SEVERAL

AND I'M CERTAIN YOU'LL INDULGE ME RHO RHUSTANE

BECAUSE WE BOTH KNOW THE COST TO YOU IF YOU DO NOT

I DON'T NEED TO STEAL YOUR POWER YET

NO, I WANT YOU TO OVERSEE A PROJECT I'VE BEGUN ON MERIDIAN

AH, REESHA

YOU HADN'T STOPPED MY MIND

MY PLANS WILL REQUIRE ME TO BE AWAY FROM CAPADOR AT TIMES

A ANYTHING

AND WHAT IS TO BECOME OF *ME?*

ARE YOU PREPARED TO BE TRAINED TO GOVERN IN MY ABSENCE?

FULLY

YOU'LL FIND ME A MOST REWARDING STUDENT, MINISTER I'AHN

JUST *I'AHN,* REESHA

MY BRIEF TASTE OF ELYSIA WAS

ILLUMINATING

I INTEND TO RETURN TO YOUR HOMELAND SOMEDAY, RHO

TO *RULE* IT

BUT EVERY CONQUEST MUST BEGIN WITH THE SIMPLE STEPS

TO GAIN ELYS A CONTROL *THIS* WORLD

TO CONTROL DEMETRIA

COMPLETE THE DOMINANCE AND RECONFIGURATION OF THE MOST BASIC OF HER ISLANDS

MERIDIAN

WAIT!

I'M GOING WITH YOU!

BUT FEABE--

YOU DON'T LIKE FLYING

I DON'T, BUT I COULDN'T LET YOU GO ALONE JAD

ALONE?

YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN ZOLKA

NOT WITHOUT ME!

IF SEPHIE'S REALLY ALIVE

I WANT TO BE THERE WITH YOU WHEN YOU FIND HER

OH

HANG ON TIGHT FEABE--

THE ROUTE AWAY FROM HESPERA IS AS ROUGH AS THE TRIP IN

OH

BUT IT WON'T BE AS BAD. THIS SHIP'S LIGHT ENOUGH TO BOUNCE OVER THE SHEARS.

SINCE WE'RE NOT LEADING THE BIGGER SHIPS WE CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUR LIGHTER WEIGHT AND GLIDE MORE

I'LL BE FUN!

FUN

LOOK! OUR FIRST PASSENGER!

DON'T TOUCH, ZOLKA IT MIGHT BITE

HEY, LITTLE FELLOW!

WHA ?

JAD -- HOW MUCH DO YOU THINK THOSE CREATURES WEIGH?

I SEE *MORE* COMING

MORE! MILLIONS!
WHERE ARE THEY COMING FROM?
THEY RE RUNNING AWAY FROM SOMETHING!
AND THEY TH NK WE RE THE NEXT ROCK!
GET THEM OFF
THEY RE OVERWE.GHTING THE SHIP!
THERE'S WHAT S AFTER THEM!
YEOWTCH!
SWING IT THIS WAY ISAGO!
LOOK
-- THEY RE RUNN NG FROM THAT!
STARS ABOVE
LOOK AT THAT TH.NG!
YOU VE CHEWED THROUGH SAILS AND SAFETY LINES A.READY
-- CAN T LOOP TO TOSS YOJ OFF --
NO WONDER YOJ RE ON THE RUN!
--SO THERE S ON.Y ONE CHOICE --

TURN BACK!
ZOUKA TAKE THE RUDDER!
GET OFF!
JAD, ARE YOU SURE HEADING BACK TOWARD IT MAKES SENSE?
SURE!
OW!
OFFA ME, YOU!
HHRRRAK
WE'RE OVERLOADED LOSING MANEUVERABILITY--
WE LET THE MONSTER SCARE OFF THE VERMIN
WRNNNGK
AND I SCARE OFF THE MONSTER!

The will of a people can often be summed up in one statement of confidence

All we had was one ship, a mismatched crew and the force of my will to protect us against Hann's battle-ready forces

Yet we were so certain of our success that no one raised an objection to my plan

But in my heart, a small voice questioned my certainty

Cadador was so powerful. Could our tiny endeavor really topple it?

I was risking people's lives by trying

I HOPE I'M RIGHT

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Faraway...

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Many of the people of Meridian, including Sephie's best friend, **Jad Takarty**, have fled to a new, wild island. Jad's father Jon is the Meridianites' unofficial leader. In the midst of a wild storm, the **Muse of Giatan** appears to them, telling Jad that Sephie is alive. Jad and a small crew are on their way to find her when they find their ship invaded...

Sephie's quest to rally support against Ilahn in honor of her parents' attempt to unite the islands in fair trade finds her en route to Massintak, the step city, accompanied by a trio of loggers, a few caverns dwellers, and **Deren Beq**, whose stories of Sephie are outracing their flight.

Meanwhile, Ilahn and his newly-powered follower **Reesha** have returned from Elysia, the home of their ally **Rho Rhustane**, and Ilahn has discovered he can absorb power from that environment...but at the cost of his self-control.

Meridian™ CrossGen CrossGen Meridian™ CrossGen

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT THIS PLAN OF YOURS JAD -
- ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT US TO ENGAGE A THING THAT SIZE DIRECTLY?
ZOUKAS POINTS SOUND WOULDN'T OUR BEST COURSE BE TO EVADE IT BY DODGING AMONG THE BARRIER ROCKS?
NOT WHILE WE'RE STILL WEIGHTED DOWN WITH THESE -- OW! -- LITTLE VERMIN
WE AREN'T MANUEVERABLE ENOUGH!
AREN'T I RIGHT, JAD?
I KNOW -
NO!
YES!

THOSE LITTLE GUYS ARE ALL RUNNING *FROM* THE BIG BEAST --

-- SO THE QUICKEST WAY TO GET RID OF THEM --

-- IS TO GO *TO* IT! WE SPOOK THEM OFF OUR SHIP BEFORE THEY DRAG US DOWN!

THEN WE JUST HAVE TO SCARE THE BIG ONE OFF THAT'S NOT A PROBLEM

BECAUSE *NO* FLYING MONSTER

-- NO MATTER HOW BIG *OR* FIERCE

-- IS GOING TO KEEP ME FROM *SEPHIE!*

JAD!

KHRAWWWR

KREEEESH

WOOOH!
FEABIE!
ZOUKA!
HANG ON!
WHUMP
WHERE'S JAD?
ISAGO DO YOU SEE HIM?
IF WE LOSE HIM, I'LL --
JAD!
DON'T
MOVE
UH
HULLO?

THERE THERE NICE MONSTER
WE DON'T MEAN YOU ANY HARM
THANKS FOR SCARING AWAY THE LITTLE ONES
YOUR SUPPER
THERE THEY GO GO GET EM
YOU WOULDN'T WANT TO EAT US
WE'RE STRINGY
KHRAWWWR
OH GWAAAAUGH! YOUR BREATH!
YOU DON'T NEED FANGS TO KILL!
WHEW

IT DOESN'T LOOK LIKE IT'S HEADING BACK LET'S GET OUT OF HERE
OH JAD! YOU *WERE* RIGHT!
I KNEW IT WAS THE BEST PLAN, FEABS
NO, *THIS* IS!
UMPF!
I
UH
WE SHOULD LOOK TO THE CONDITION OF THE SAILS AND HULL
HNN!
THAT'S *RIGHT!*
WE'RE ON OUR WAY TO GET *SEPHIE!*
SEPHIE ALWAYS COMES FIRST!
I'M SORRY FEABIE

The sky between Cadador and the Caverns is empty of livable islands but dotted with grotto clusters
These floating swamps offer shade to weary travelers
and hiding places for predator ships
With Cadador's might so firmly established, piracy has been eliminated
That is, until NOW
I ALWAYS ENJOY THIS LEG OF THE TRADE ROUTE
IT'S SUCH A BLESSED RELIEF TO REACH THE SHADE AFTER DAYS OF OPEN SKY
HEY!
WHAT IN THE NAME OF FALLING ROCKS IS THAT?
YOU LOOK SO SURPRISED!
DON'T THE GIRLS FROM CADADOR FLY?
THEY'RE NEARLY IN POSITION
ON MY SIGNAL
GO!

IS THIS AN ATTACK?
WHAT IS SHE?
SHE MAY BE JUST A DIVERSION!
THERE'S AN UNSCHEDULED SHIP TO OUR STERN!
AN AMBUSH EH?
BUT WHO--?
HMMM..
I DON'T RECOGNIZE THAT SAIL DEVICE
NOW! BOARD THEM!
REMEMBER THE TARGETS!
SEPHIE!
I NEED TO GET ACROSS QUICKLY--
--CAN YOU CARRY ME?

WHY?
WHAT ARE YOU SEEING DEREN?
OH--F, ARE LAUNCHER
IF I DON'T STOP H.M. HE'LL ALERT ANYONE WHO MIGHT BE WITHIN THE VISUAL ARC
SO I'LL TAKE HIM OUT
I'LL DO IT
I CAN GET THERE FASTEST ALONE
BAD THOUGHT, CHILD
YOU'RE NOT LEAVING ME OUT OF THE FUN
OH?
IF THAT'S THE CASE
HEY!
HANG ON!
KKRRNCH
GHHN!
There are five major points of defense for a skyship
The upper mast, used for sighting and signaling

SO, WHAT'S NEXT?
The rigging, by which you gain control of the lower masts
Its long-range defenses-- skyfire launchers and harpoon racks
The Captain's wheel and its control of the rudder sails
and the sails themselves, the heart of a ship's maneuverability and identity
Control these areas, and a ship is yours.
NOTHING!
LOOKS LIKE EVERYTHING IS GOING ACCORDING TO PLAN!

FIRST VICTORY GOES TO THE PIRATES OF THE WIND!
YAAAAY!!
WHA?
Uh, Oh!
Uh
NO!
AW NO
THERE'S A SECOND TRADER!
WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

IT APPEARS THAT YOUR AMATEUR REBELLION WILL BE SHORT-LIVED
WE'LL BE BACK ON OUR ROUTE IN NO TIME
PERHAPS
PERHAPS NOT
THE WINDS ARE CERTAINLY CHANGEABLE TODAY
SCORE ONE FOR THE FORCES OF MASSANTAK!
WE'D BEST TELL LEHDEN HE'S OUTDONE HIMSELF WITH THIS SHIP'S DESIGN!
LEAVE YOUR THINKING IN THE LAB! TIMES FOR DOING!
THOSE CADADORANS WON'T KNOW WE'RE UPON 'EM UNTIL THEY SMELL THE SMOKE FROM THEIR BURNING BEHINDS!
OH
GLAD TO SEE YA, FELLAS!
EVEN MORE TO SEE YOU'RE WEARING OUR SIGN!
OOOOOOYA!
BY THE STARS, DANEYN--THEY'VE BROUGHT THEIR OWN FORT ALONG!
LOOK AT ITS SIZE!
THAT SHIP'S A WEEK'S WORTH OF OUR LABOR HARVESTING ITS TIMBERS!
AND IT'S GOT THE SIGN, TOO!

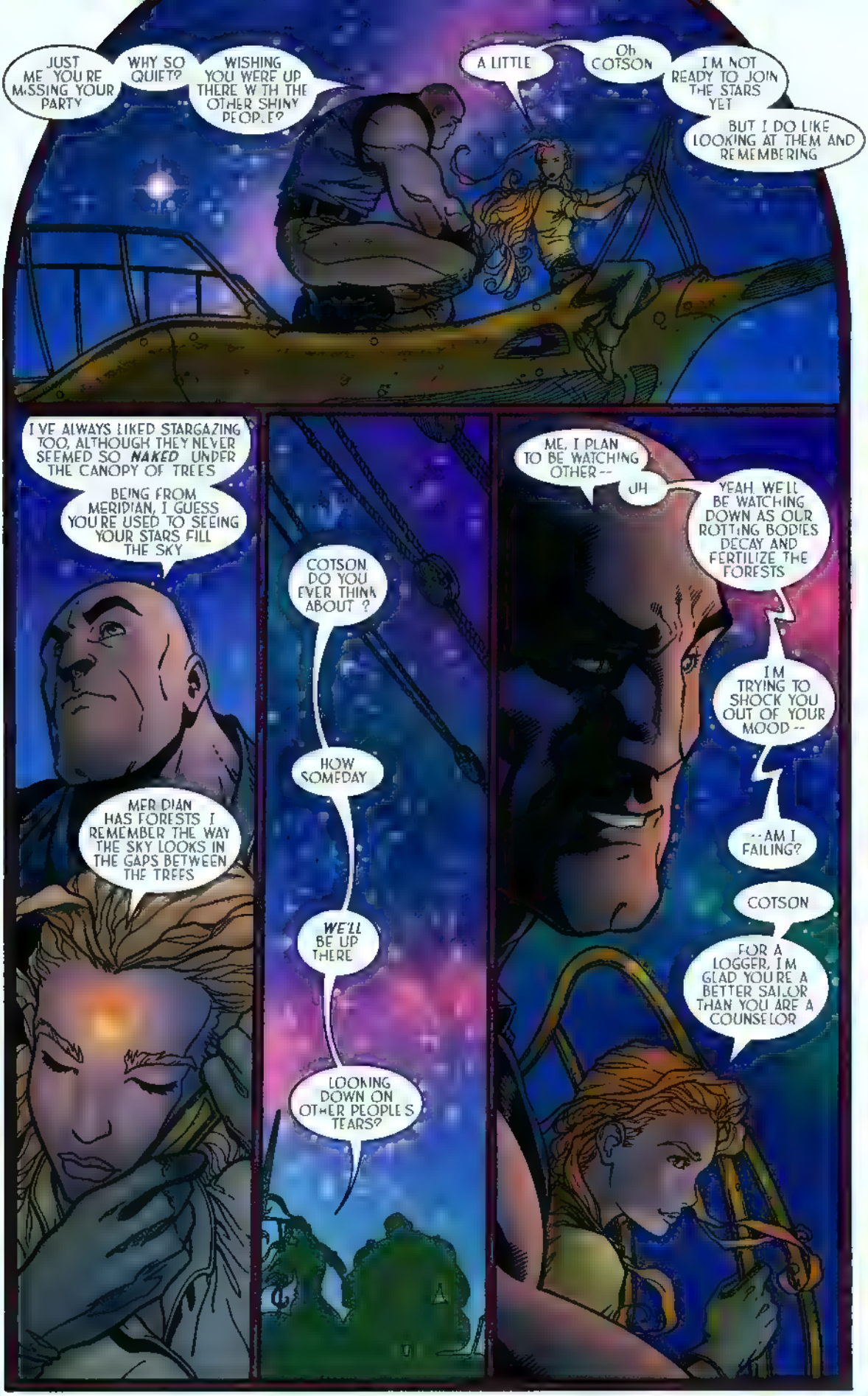
CAPADOR'S GOT TO BE TWITCHING IN ITS SLEEP NOW
ONCE THE ONE WE LET GO REPORTS HOME
OUR SEPHE'S GOING TO NEED EVERY SHIP SHE CAN WIN OVER TO BALANCE OUT CAPADOR'S RESPONSE!
WE'VE DONE A BRAWL OR TWO IN OUR TIME, DANEYN. THIS ADVENTURE PROMISES TO OUTDO THEM ALL!
WELCOME BACK TO CAPADOR PORT, VEKKA!
GOOD JOURNEY?
WHAT'S THE WORD FROM ON HIGH?
QUITE AN UNUSUAL TRIP, AVY--
WAIT TILL I TELL YOU!

ANYTHING JUICY?
YOU'RE SIMPLY NOT GOING TO BELIEVE WHAT—
AH!
CAPTAIN PATGIEN GOT DRUNK AND SPENT THE JOURNEY IN HIS CABIN AGAIN DIDN'T HE?
NO THAT'S NOT IT AT ALL
IN FACT, HE'S ACTING LIKE A CHANGED MAN AGAIN
EY?
VEKKA!
CAPTAIN PATGIEN
-- DIDN'T HE LOSE THAT ARM?
HE DID
HE GOT IT BACK AGAIN
EH?
AVY, THE MINISTER OF MERIDIAN HAS TURNED INTO SOMETHING FROM HERO TALES!
SHE CAN FLY ON HER OWN AND SHE MADE THE CAPTAIN'S ARM REAPPEAR
WHA--?
TELL ME EVERYTHING VEKKA!
I HAVE PEOPLE FROM BACK HOME WHO'LL BE DYING TO KNOW SEPHIE DIDN'T DIE!
TELL ME EVERYTHING!

STAY HERE
I'LL NEED TO SEE LAHN ALONE
BOSCAL
INFORM MINISTER LAHN THAT I HAVE AN IMPORTANT COMMUNICATION FOR HIM
FROM HIS NIECE
BUT HIS NIECE IS DEAD CAPTAIN PATGEN
SURELY YOU HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN
OH
YOUR ARM
THE GIRL'S DOING
WAIT HERE PLEASE
I'LL INFORM THE MINISTER
SO IT'S TRUE

THE MIN STER OF MERIDIAN LIVES
LIKE YOURSELF SHE HAS BEEN CHANGED, M N STER ILAHN
SHE ROSE THROUGH THE SKY TO MEET MY TRADE SHIP
-- SHE CAPTAINS ONE WITH A SUN DEVICE, BUT SHE FLEW NDEPENDENTLY OF IT
SEE NG THE UNREG STERED SHIP WE PRESSED OUR AUTHORITY
BUT SHE COULD NOT BE STOPPED
SHE NTENDS TO CHALLENGE YOUR -- CADADOR'S SUPREMACY IN TRADE
DOES SHE
YOUR ARM
WHAT REASON DID SHE G VE FOR TS RESTORATION?
IT WAS INTENDED AS A KINDNESS AND A MESSAGE
SHE FLIES, MY MINISTER
THERE S A GLOW TO HER
SEE NG HER N MOTION WAS SIMPLY BREATHTAK NG
HMMM
THANK YOU FOR YOUR REPORT, CAPTAIN
I THINK THIS ADVANCES THE T METABLE FOR MY MERIDIAN PROJECT

In a day, we had gone from one rogue ship to an aerial force of four
The allies I'd hoped to find in Massintal came to us instead
They said there were more coming, that people were excited about the stories they've heard already
The rumors Deren Beq had commanded be spread were becoming outrageous tales of my heroism
I might be heroic on the outside
but there were fears squirming in my insides and I needed time to look to the stars for guidance
THERE SHE IS
SEPH E?
WHO ..?


JUST ME YOU RE M.SSING YOUR PARTY
WHY SO QUIET?
WISHING YOU WERE UP THERE W TH THE OTHER SHINY PEOP.E?
A LITTLE
Oh COTSON
I M NOT READY TO JOIN THE STARS YET
BUT I DO LIKE LOOKING AT THEM AND REMEMBERING
I VE ALWAYS LIKED STARGAZING TOO, ALTHOUGH THEY NEVER SEEMED SO NAKED UNDER THE CANOPY OF TREES
BEING FROM MERIDIAN, I GUESS YOU RE USED TO SEEING YOUR STARS FILL THE SKY
MER DIAN HAS FORESTS I REMEMBER THE WAY THE SKY LOOKS IN THE GAPS BETWEEN THE TREES
COTSON DO YOU EVER THINK ABOUT ?
HOW SOMEDAY
WE'LL BE UP THERE
LOOKING DOWN ON OTHER PEOPLE S TEARS?
ME, I PLAN TO BE WATCHING OTHER --
UH
YEAH WE'LL BE WATCHING DOWN AS OUR ROTTING BODIES DECAY AND FERTILIZE THE FORESTS
I M TRYING TO SHOCK YOU OUT OF YOUR MOOD --
--AM I FAILING?
COTSON
FOR A LOGGER, I M GLAD YOU RE A BETTER SAILOR THAN YOU ARE A COUNSELOR

I'M A BETTER SEAMSTRESS THAN BOTH, SEPH
BUT LET ME SAY SOMETHING REAL HERE
YOU'VE GOT US TRYING TO UNITE THE CITIES TO BREAK CADAPORS MONOPOLY
YOU'RE *DOING* A GREAT THING
YOU'VE ALREADY *DONE* GREAT THINGS
THERE'S GONNA BE MOMENTS WHEN IT'S A *HARD* THING, TOO
THAT'S WHEN YOU'VE GOT TO REMEMBER YOU'VE GOT FRIENDS HERE
YOU'VE GOT MORE THAN JUST THE STARS WATCHING OVER YOU, LITTLE GIRL
YOU'VE GOT ME
YOU'VE GOT ME. YOU SEND ME YOUR TROUBLES, I'LL BEAT 'EM TO DEATH
C'MON, SEPH. LEAVE THE STARS TO SHINE ON THEIR OWN AND COME JOIN YOUR PARTY
..NIGHT W LL COME AGAIN TOMORROW BUT YOUR FIRST VICTORY COMES ONLY ONCE
AND YOU MIGHT WANT TO SAY A K ND WORD TO CRENNER
..UDG NG FROM THE WAY HE'S SPYING
--THAT YOUNG LAD'S GOT A CRUSH ON ONE OF US
ME. I'M BETTING IT'S YOU

Sometimes we look too far away for answers
not realizing they're right here beside us

HEED MY WORDS RHO RHUSTANE
SOON I WILL BE MINISTER OF YOUR OWN HOME CITY
ELYSIA WILL NOT SLIP MY GRASP
NOR WILL I FORGET YOUR ROLE IN OPENING MY EYES TO BOTH ITS EXISTENCE AND MY ABILITY TO CONTROL YOU AND YOUR POWERFUL BRETHREN
HOWEVER, I'M SURE YOU'LL BE RELIEVED TO BE REMOVED FOR A TIME FROM THE NEARNESS OF MY TOUCH
MERIDIAN
SUCH A SMALL ISLAND, REALLY
IT'S VALUE IS MORE SENTIMENTAL THAN STRATEGIC
CURBING ITS WILDNESS WILL FORCE THE OTHER ISLANDS TO SEE REASON
I'M SENDING YOU THERE WITH TWO OBJECTIVES
YOU WILL SEE TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF MY SPECIALLY COMMISSIONED SHIP
AND ENSURE THAT THE REEDUCATION OF ITS REMAINING POPULATION IS ACCOMPLISHED
IT IS FITTING

THAT MERIDIAN ITSELF BE THE FIRST WEAPON IN MY WAR AGAINST HER MINISTER
SIMMONS & SON

The CrossGen Universe created by Mark Alessi & Gina M. Villa

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Far away...

on the world of Demetria, explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

One of these islands is **Meridian,** home of shipbuilders and **Sephie,** the daughter of Minister Turos. Sephie's life has been spent being groomed to someday take over the ruling of Meridian. Her uncle **Ilahn** is the Minister of the rich city-state of Cadador, which controls most of the shipping and trade on Demetria.

When a mysterious force endows both brothers with the Sigil, a link to power, Turos (weakened by Ilahn's poisoning) dies, and his sigil is transferred to Sephie.

Ilahn gains the power to speed decay and create destruction. Sephie finds she has the power to force renewal, allowing her to heal, propel herself through the sky, and move things without touching them.

Ilahn tries, and fails, to control Sephie. Now he wants to gain control of all Demetria, beginning with his conquest of the island where he was born: Meridian.

Many of the people of Meridian, including Sephie's best friend, **Jad Takarty,** have fled to a new, wild island, Hesperia. Jad, who learns Sephie is alive from the **Muse of Giatan,** and a small crew are on their way to find her when they find their ship invaded by small vermin. Jad scares them off by flying into the path of the predator persuing them, which leaves after deciding the humans won't make a good meal.

Sephie's quest to rally support against Ilahn finds her en route to Massintak, the step city, accompanied by a trio of loggers, a few caverns dwellers, and **Deren Beq,** whose stories of Sephie are outracing their flight. Sephie's pirates have just led their first successful raid on a pair of Cadadorian trade ships, assisted by an experimental ship from Massintak.

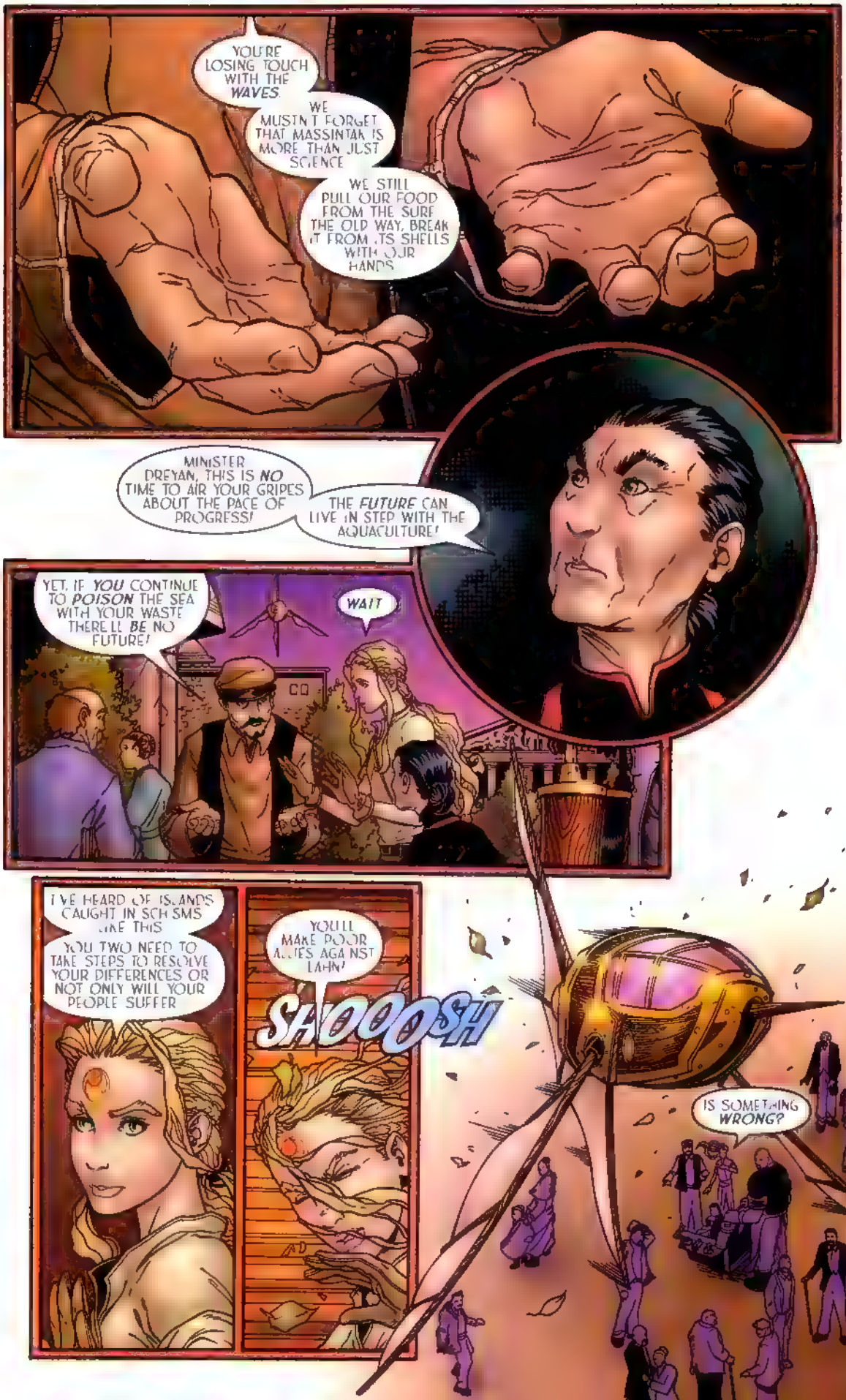
Meanwhile, Ilahn, plotting with **Reesha** and **Rho Rhustane,** has just been informed that Sephie lives. He has sent Rho to Meridian to oversee the construction of a new ship...and control the remaining population.

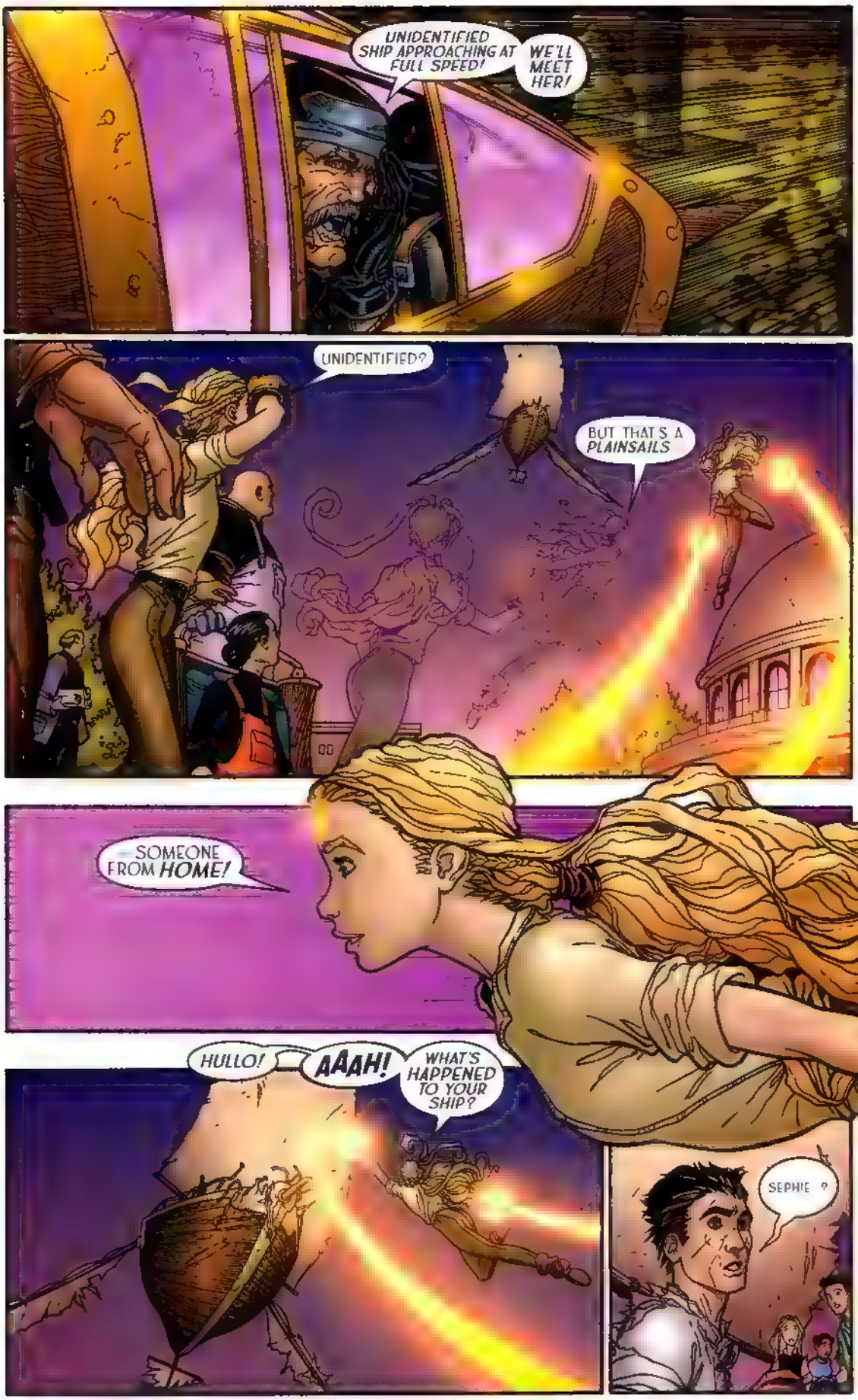
Meridian [illegible] NOVEMBER [illegible] CrossGen CrossGen Comics CrossGeneration [illegible] Meridian [illegible] the CrossGen sig [illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]

Papa would say I was engaged in bad business
After all, we had forced our way onto two Cadadorian trade ships and commandeered them both
That's thievery, not trade
That's not the way we do things on Meridian
But I was not on Meridian anymore
Massintax is a very old city, nearly as old as Meridian

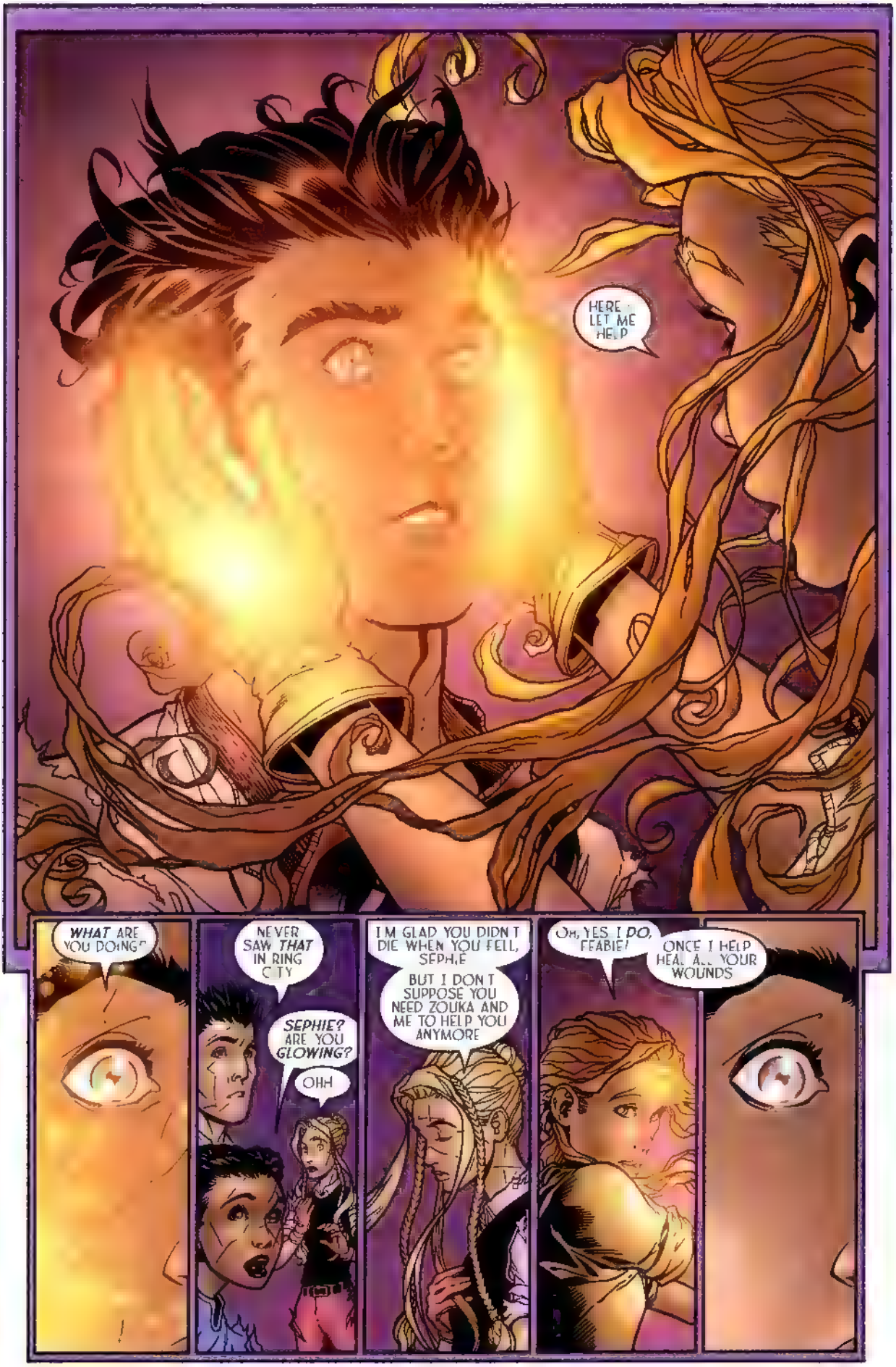
We traveled there to meet our newest allies
and to thank them for coming to our rescue
HULO!
I M SEPHIE
I M --
AH, I KNOW WHO YOU ARE
WORD HAS REACHED US OF THE FLYING MINISTER OF MERIDIAN AND HER EFFORTS TO DEVELOP A NEW TRADE CARTEL
A FASCINATING DISRUPTION OF ILAHN'S CURRENT MONOPOLY, I'D ADD
I'M WYNTREN I COORDINATE OUR STUDIES HERE
THIS IS NAUK HE PROVIDES MY MOBILITY
WELCOME TO MASSINTAK
I HEAR OUR NEW SHIPS AIDED YOUR EFFORTS?
INCREDIBLY SO!
THANK YOU SO MUCH --
YOUR SMALL DARTERS -- I'VE NEVER SEEN SUCH MANEUVERABILITY, AND I'M FROM MERIDIAN!
BUT YOUR SHIPS ARE WORKS OF ART
OURS ARE LITTLE MORE THAN THE PHYSICAL EMBODIMENT OF SCIENTIFIC PRINCIPLE
WE'RE CONSTANTLY SEEKING OUT NEW CHALLENGES AND YOUR AUDACIOUS ACTIONS HAVE PROVIDED US WITH A NEW ONE!
I'M DELIGHTED TO BE INVOLVED

WE DO LOTS OF THINKING HERE BUT THERE'S NOT ALWAYS AN OUTLET FOR THE DOING
YET YOU'RE ALWAYS DOING
DREYAN! WELCOME!
LADY WYNTREN, MY LADY MINISTER-- PLEASED
DREYAN?
YOU'RE THE MINISTER OF MASSINTAK
IN NAME ONLY
WYNTREN'S INSTITUTE HAS ALL BUT ELIMINATED THE TRADITIONAL WAYS
PROGRESS
WE MUST ALWAYS SEEK IT OUT
THE WORLD IS CONSTANTLY CHANGING AND WE MUST MEET ITS SPEED
THAT'S WHAT WE'RE TRYING TO DO--CHANGE THE WORLD
IT'S ABOUT TIME SOMEBODY SHOOK UP OLD ILAHN'S COMFORTABLE LITTLE RACKET
I'M PROUD TO BE ABLE TO SUPPLY YOU WITH SOME MUSCLE
I APPRECIATE IT
ARE ALL THESE BUILDINGS FOR NEW SHIPS?
OH, NO WE COVER ALL THE SCIENCES MATHEMATICS, CHEMISTRY, MECHANICS
WE COULD BE FURTHER ALONG IN OUR EXPERIMENTS, BUT MASSINTAK'S SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH HAS BEEN CRIPPLED BY ILAHN'S TARIFFS AND RESTRICTIONS
AH, HE HAS ENSURED THAT THE PRICE OF PROGRESS IS TOO STEEP
IF WE WERE FREE TO SHOW WHAT WE COULD REALLY ACCOMPLISH YOU'D SEE BETTER INNOVATIONS THAN JUST OUR LITTLE AIR FIGHTERS
BY THE WAY, I'D LOVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO RUN SOME TESTS ON THAT UNIQUE PROPULSION METHOD YOU EMPLOY
ME?
THE GIRL'S NOT A NEW TOY WYNTREN
JUST AS MASSINTAK'S NOT JUST TINKERERS


YOU'RE LOSING TOUCH WITH THE WAVES.
WE MUSTN'T FORGET THAT MASSINTAK IS MORE THAN JUST SCIENCE.
WE STILL PULL OUR FOOD FROM THE SURF THE OLD WAY. BREAK IT FROM ITS SHELLS WITH OUR HANDS.
MINISTER DREYAN, THIS IS NO TIME TO AIR YOUR GRIPES ABOUT THE PACE OF PROGRESS!
THE FUTURE CAN LIVE IN STEP WITH THE AQUACULTURE!
YET, IF YOU CONTINUE TO POISON THE SEA WITH YOUR WASTE THERE'LL BE NO FUTURE!
WAIT
I'VE HEARD OF ISLANDS CAUGHT IN SCHISMS LIKE THIS
YOU TWO NEED TO TAKE STEPS TO RESOLVE YOUR DIFFERENCES OR NOT ONLY WILL YOUR PEOPLE SUFFER
YOU'LL MAKE POOR ALLIES AGAINST LAHN!
SHOOOSH
IS SOMETHING WRONG?


UNIDENTIFIED SHIP APPROACHING AT FULL SPEED!
WE'LL MEET HER!
UNIDENTIFIED?
BUT THAT'S A PLAINSAILS
SOMEONE FROM HOME!
HULLO!
AAAH!
WHAT'S HAPPENED TO YOUR SHIP?
SEPHIE ?

SEPHIE!
JAD!
YOU RE
YOU RE --
YOU RE HERE!
OH JAD
I CAN T BELIEVE--!
UH
SORRY !
UM
I D DN T MEAN TO
Oh LOOK AT US
YOU VE REALLY CHANGED
YOU RE HURT!


HERE... LET ME HELP
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
NEVER SAW THAT IN RING CITY
SEPHIE? ARE YOU GLOWING?
OHH
I'M GLAD YOU DIDN'T DIE WHEN YOU FELL, SEPHIE
BUT I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU NEED ZOUKA AND ME TO HELP YOU ANYMORE
OH, YES I DO, FEABIE!
ONCE I HELP HEAL ALL YOUR WOUNDS

YOU CAN HELP ME!

WE'RE GOING TO STOP UNCLE ILAHN FROM CRUSHING DEMETRA!

THEN WE CAN ALL GO HOME!

SEPHIE ABOUT MERIDIAN

THERE'S SOMETHING YOU SHOULD KNOW

WE DON'T LIVE THERE ANYMORE

"We don't live there anymore"

All the while I'd dreamed of them being back home, they weren't

They told me the whole story, how Jad followed me, how they thought I'd died

But Hesperia?

No Meridian?

My heart plunged faster than I'd fallen to earth

If the people I cared most about had left the island

where was MY home?

But my fears had to be put aside while we saw to the task at hand--disrupting Ilahn's trade

It became almost easy--take over trade ships and then let them continue on their way (sending some of the crew from our two commandeered ships home on each ship)

having learned that Ilahn couldn't protect them from us

Then the same speech, over and over

ATTENTION, CAPTAIN FROM FALGRIFF!

YOU ARE UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE PIRATES OF THE WIND!

WE RULE THE SKIES IN DEFIANCE OF CADADORS INEFFECTIVE PROTECTION!

ILAHN CAN NO LONGER GUARANTEE YOUR SAFE PASSAGE!

WE'RE CREATING A NEW COALITION OF TRADING STATES, ONE THAT WILL TREAT ALL CITIES FAIRLY

SO GO HOME TO YOUR PEOPLE AND ASK THEM IF THEY'D LIKE TO BE FREE OF ILAHN'S RESTRICTIONS--

--AND IF THEY'RE WILLING TO HELP PAY THE PRICE OF THAT FREEDOM BY JOINING US

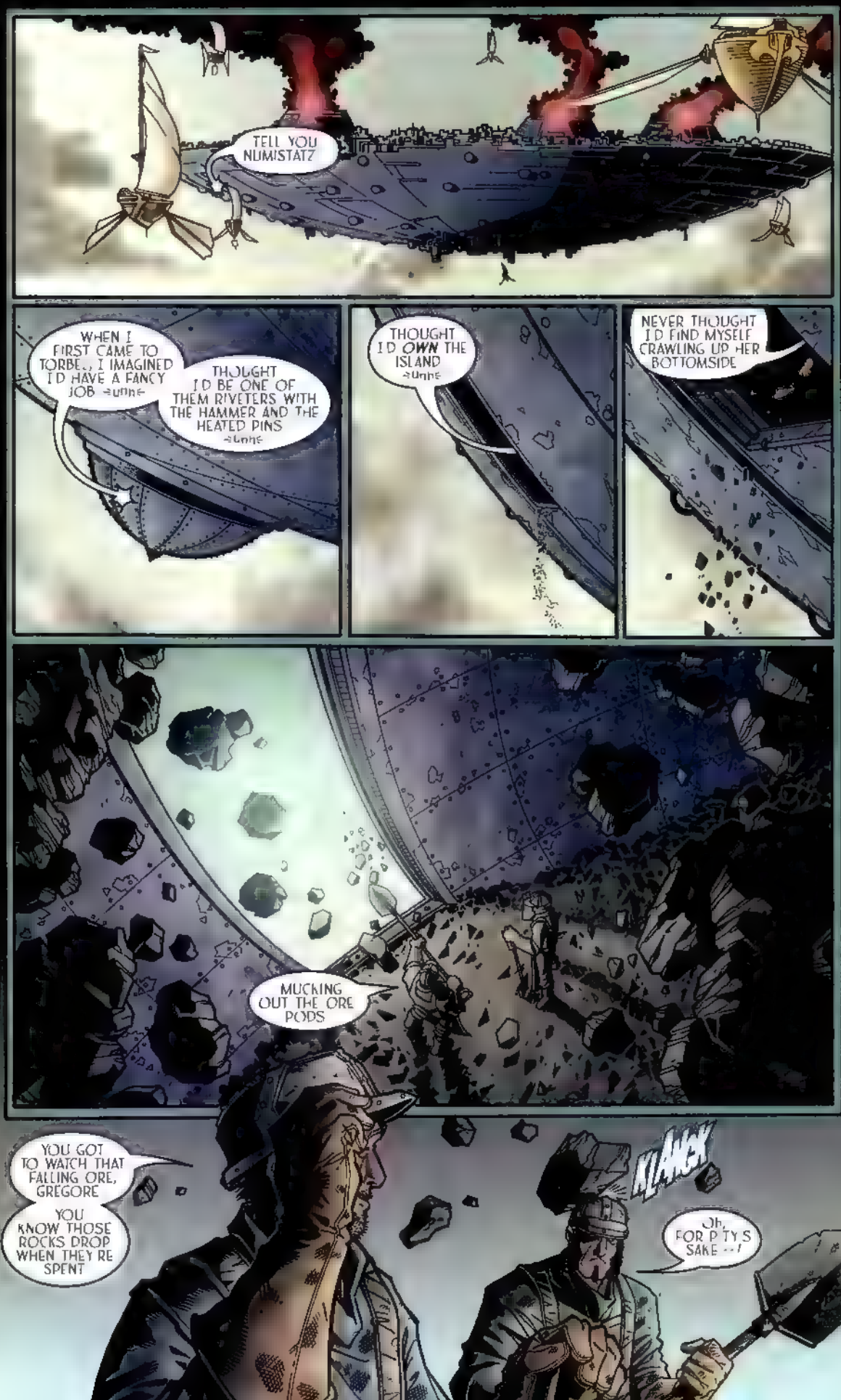
I wish I could say my mind was always on my mission

but it kept wandering back to the future of Meridian

DERIA
YOUR CHILD DEFIES ME
THAT CANNOT CONTINUE
GOOD EVENING MINISTER RUDEF SOLICITOR TRUPERT
HOW FARES TORBEL?

NOT WELL, MINISTER ILAHN
YOU DRIVE A MEAN BARGAIN, BUT WE'VE GOT TRADE SHIPS IN YOUR DOCKS BEARING THREE OF TORBEL'S FINEST ORE PODS
DELIVERED GRATIS AS A SIGN OF OUR RESPECT
ALL WE ASK IS THAT YOU GIVE THE ORDER TO RELEASE THE EMBARGO ON ORE SHIPMENTS TO TORBEL
WE'LL PAY TWICE THE GOING RATE
NO
WHA--?
ILAHN, WE'RE DOWN TO DREGS AND LISTING ALREADY--
YOU'LL DROP US!
PERHAPS
STARS ABOVE! ILAHN DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOU'RE SAYING?
THINK, MAN!
WE CAN'T EVACUATE AN ISLAND TORBEL'S SIZE BEFORE
IT'S TOO LATE!
YOU'VE MADE YOUR OWN DOOM!
TORBEL WILL FALL!
NOW, IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME--

...I'M CERTAIN YOU'LL BE EAGER TO RETURN HOME
--AND I HAVE BUSINESS TO ATTEND TO
THE BUSINESS OF TEACHING MY MISGUIDED NIECE THE TRUE MEANING OF POWER


TELL YOU NUMISTATZ
WHEN I FIRST CAME TO TORBE., I IMAGINED I'D HAVE A FANCY JOB =unnh=
THOUGHT I'D BE ONE OF THEM RIVETERS WITH THE HAMMER AND THE HEATED PINS =unnh=
THOUGHT I'D OWN THE ISLAND =unnh=
NEVER THOUGHT I'D FIND MYSELF CRAWLING UP HER BOTTOMSIDE
MUCKING OUT THE ORE PODS
YOU GOT TO WATCH THAT FALLING ORE, GREGORE
YOU KNOW THOSE ROCKS DROP WHEN THEY RE SPENT
KLANCK
OH, FOR PITY'S SAKE --!

BAD ENOUGH WE'RE SO LOW ON ORE WE CAN'T REPLENISH THE PODS AS WE GO
I WAS GONNA SEE THE KIDS NEXT WEEK BUT NOW I'LL BE BACK HERE SHOVELING ONCE THE DAMN POLITICIANS STOP POINTING IT AT EACH OTHER LONG ENOUGH TO DO THEIR WORK AND GET US OUR ORE!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY'RE UP TO, THESE JOKERS
HOLDING OUT ON 'EM AIN'S JUST SUICIDE
IT'S ALL A GAME TO THOSE FANCY TYPES
THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT IT IS TO WORK
NUMISTATZ!
WHAT HAPPENS IF THEY DON'T WORK IT OUT?
WE'VE GOT NO RESERVES WE'VE ALREADY SHOVELED THE LAST OF THAT
KLANCK
WE FALL, THAT'S WHAT HAPPENS
UNH

MAYBE I SHOULD GO SEE THE KIDS NEXT WEEK
HIGHER!
UP PAPA, UP! LET ME-- UNGK!
THAT'S AS HIGH AS I GO
YOU'LL HAVE TO GROW A LITTLE!
KERAKKK
AIEEE!
WHA--?
HA HA HA
PAPA, YOU NEARLY DROPPED ME!
SO I DID
MIND THE STEP ANDHI LOOKS LIKE TORBELS COMING APART AT THE SEAMS
WILL YOU HAVE TO MEND IT PAPA?
I HOPE NOT ANDHI
THAT WOULD BE A VERY BIG JOB!

I TOLD YOU MY NAME
RHO RHUSTANE
THE FACT THAT YOU HAVE NOT HEARD OF ME IS UNIMPORTANT
I HAVE COME TO MERIDIAN TO ASSUME CONTROL OF THIS PROJECT AT THE REQUEST OF ILAHN OF CADADOR, TO WHOM I MUST REPORT
MUST I TELL HIM HOW LITTLE YOU'VE ACCOMPLISHED?
ALTHOUGH
HMMM
I SUPPOSE IT IS PROMISING
LET'S SEE WHAT I CAN MAKE OF IT!

LET IT BECOME A CONVEYANCE FIT FOR A GOD!
RRRRRRRRRR
WOOOOMF
THAT'S BETTER

Success was clearly favoring us!
We'd gained so many allies so quickly, my beautiful new ship was bursting at the seams
so much so that I had to LEAVE it to find the room to think!
LOOK AT YOU
GMMF!
TAKE HIM BELOW

HEY!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
DEREN?
WHUMP
I THOUGHT WE NEEDED A LITTLE DISCUSSION, JAD TAKARTY
MEET YOUR NEW COUNCIL OF ADVISERS. TO MY RIGHT, THERE'S COTSON DANEYN, ENNIS, RASE AND HONDELL
JUST WANTED YOU TO KNOW WE'LL BE GUIDING YOU IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION --
I DON'T UNDERSTAND THIS AT ALL --
WHAT DO YOU THINK I'VE DONE?
IT'S WHAT YOU MIGHT DO
YOU AND SEPHIE ARE GETTING AWFULLY CLOSE
JUST WHAT ARE YOUR INTENTIONS?
SEF UH
WE'RE WE'RE FRIENDS!
WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER ALL OUR LIVES!

WE --
LISTEN TO ME
SHE'S ON A MISSION
WE ARE LINKING OUR LIVES TO IT
ALL OF DEMETRIA COULD BE CHANGED BY WHAT SHE DOES NEXT
WE CAN'T HAVE YOU DISTRACTING HER
DO YOU UNDERSTAND HOW IMPORTANT SHE IS?
SEPHIE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN THE WORLD TO ME!
GOOD
THEN I CAN COUNT ON YOUR HELP
YES!
I WOULD NEVER GET IN THE WAY OF WHAT WE'RE DOING HERE
AND I WOULD NEVER HURT SEPHIE
I KNOW
I JUST MADE SURE OF THAT
SEPHIE MAY BE YOUR ONE TRUE STAR
BUT I'M THE ONE YOU NEED TO WATCH
SEPHIE
IT'S ALWAYS SEPHIE

The CrossGen Universe created by Mark Alessi & Gina M. Villa
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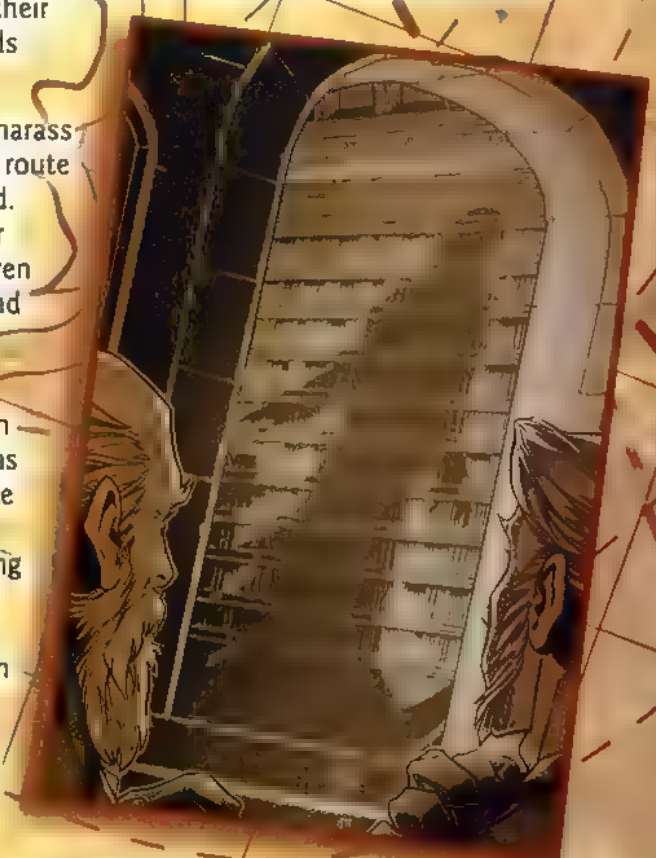
Sephie's quest to rally support against Ilahn takes her to the waters surrounding Massintak, the step city, accompanied by a trio of loggers, a few caverns dwellers, and **Deren Beq**, whose stories of Sephie are outracing their flight, bringing them new volunteers. Sephie is reunited with **Jad**, who has brought a small crew from Hesperia because of a vision from the **Muse of Giatan**. To their surprise, the childhood friends share their first kiss.

Sephie's pirates continue to harass the ships on Cadador's trade route to prove Ilahn can be stopped. They are enjoying spectacular success, so much so that Deren feels compelled to threaten Jad with the consequences of distracting Sephie.

Meanwhile, Ilahn, plotting with **Reesha** and **Rho Rhustane**, has sent Rho to Meridian to oversee the construction of a new ship...and control the remaining population. In a meeting with the representatives from the ironworking city of Torbel, Ilahn has just refused their peace offering and is enforcing the embargo on the ore that keeps their heavy city aloft...



KEEP WATCHING, MEN
THE REBELS SHOULD ENGAGE US ANY TIME NOW
THERE SHE IS!

ATTENTION, CADADORIAN TRADER!
YES, GO ON. GIVE THE THREAT
YOUR PASSAGE IS BEING CHALLENGED BY THE PIRATES OF THE WIND!
MINISTER JAHN WARNED US YOU MIGHT INTERFERE. I'D ADVISE YOU TO LET US GO ABOUT OUR BUSINESS WITHOUT INTERRUPTION
I HAVE BEEN GIVEN FULL AUTHORITY TO TAKE ANY ACTION NECESSARY TO PROTECT MY CARGO AND CREW
THEN YOUR WARNING AND AUTHORITY SHOULD COMBINE TO ADVISE YOU TO SURRENDER YOUR SHIP OR PREPARE TO BE BOARDED!
NATURE HAS GRACED YOU WITH SOME PHENOMENON OF STRENGTH, BUT YOUR STRANGE POWER DOES NOT GRANT YOU LICENSE TO DISRUPT THE COMMERCE OF DEMETRIA!
WE'RE NOT GIVING IN AND NONE OF MY MEN'LL BE JOINING YOUR PIRACY, MISS!
NO YOUNG GIRL, FLYING OR NOT, WILL STOP THE FORCES OF MIGHTY CADADOR!
DO YOUR WORST!

The Pirates of the Wind--a romantic name for the unromantic trials of working to change our world's only system of trade
Uncle Hahn may have had time for news of our blockades to reach him in Cadador
but the engineers of Massineau had also had time to apply their enthusiasm to the challenges of piracy. By adapting sails to fit sailors, they allowed us a safer form of boarding
one every sailor was eager to test
Today I wasn't the only one to fly

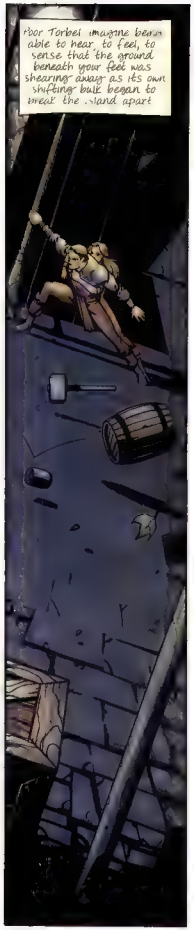
I could not go again. They had to wait for our support ship to dock against the captured one
I may lead our forces, but DEREN BEQ took charge of the battle plans
Stopping fights among rowdy patrons in her cavern's meeting house was probably better training than my queter life on Meridian
Taking their ship proved to be simple
When wouldn't happen until after we gained control of the ship—we'd learned to keep our own ships out of the range of the skyfire launchers
With no other power strong enough to oppose them, the Cadadorian soldiers had become lazy and complacent
OUR side held many people used to hard labor--loggers miners farmers
and quite a few who viewed brawling as recreation
Which meant the biggest danger our fighters faced
was an accident if they forgot to reattach their safety lines after detaching them from the portable sails

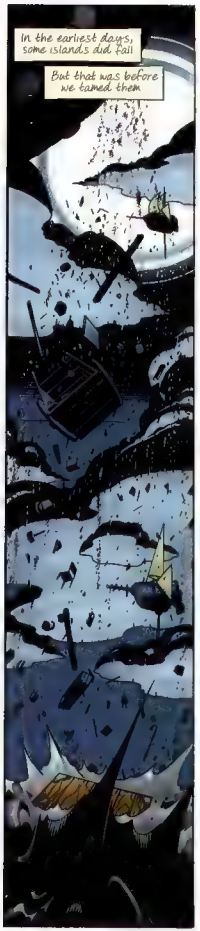
I'd been asked to read myself in reserve until the first wave had landed
Good for the men's morale Deren said
I could understand that
Especially in the case of one particular man
HEY, SEPH! YOU'RE DOING GREAT, DAD
THINK SO?
EH, SEPH
WHEN THIS'S OVER CAN WE FIND A SPOT TO TALK JUST US?
I'D LIKE THAT
VERY MUCH
ENNIS!
WHUMP
OH!
UH WE SHOULD GET BACK TO THIS
AH, YES. TAKING CONTROL OF THE SHIP
AND MARKING IT WITH OUR SIGN
YOUR SIGN SLEIPNIR

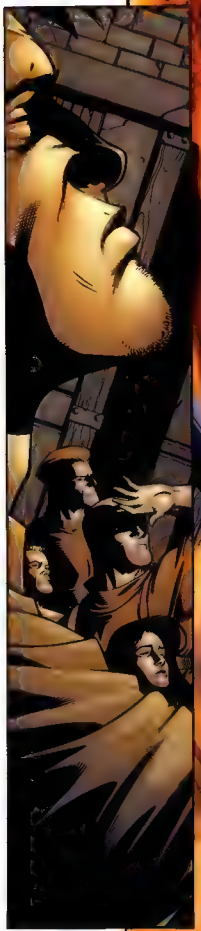
WE'RE ALL HERE BECAUSE OF YOU!
A HEY! HAVE REACHED THE REBELLION?
I NEED TO SPEAK WITH YOUR LEADER!
CAN YOU DIRECT ME TO THE MINISTER OF MERIDIAN?
YOU'RE COMING WITH ME?
AAH! IT'S TRUE!
YES. I FLY. CAN I HELP YOU?
I'VE COME FROM TORBEL! OUR ISLAND'S IN GRAVE DANGER... WE'RE OUT OF ORE! LAHN'S HOLDING TO HIS EMBARGO!
CAN YOU HELP US?
HE'S DONE IT.
HE'S REALLY GOING TO LET AN ISLAND FALL.
I
MAYBE I CAN
CRENNER!
I'M GOING AHEAD TO TORBEL!
MAYBE I CAN RENEW THE ORE THEY HAVE!
TELL EVERYONE!
LOTSON? SHOULD WE FOLLOW HER?
WE'VE GOT THE CADADORS UNDER CONTROL.
SEPHIE'S AN AMAZING GIRL CRENNER. BUT EVEN MIRACLES HAVE THEIR LIMITS.
IF SEPHIE CAN'T DO ANYTHING TO STOP TORBEL FROM FALLING

THEN THEY'LL NEED ALL THE HELP THEY CAN GET TO EVACUATE THE ISLAND

Torbel is Demetria's nearest island. The ironworkers there create the ore pods most cities use to help keep them aloft.
Torbel's ability to earn enough to support itself has always been a particular point of pride.
Now all that extra weight would mean a surer tragedy.


Poor Torbel imagine being able to hear, to feel, to sense that the ground beneath your feet was shearing away as its own shifting bulk began to wrest the island apart.


In the earliest days, some islands did fail.
But that was before we tamed them.



It hadn't happened at any time in living memory.
But it was happening now, and for no good reason!
If I'd had any doubts about Uncle Ilahn's being a monster, they were gone.
He'd put Torbel in harm's way with no one to help them.
SHE NEEDS TIME
PEOPLE OF TORBEL?
HEAR ME

LISTEN TO MY WORDS AND KNOW MY VISION SEES TRUE. TORBEL WILL SOON LIE BENEATH THE CORRUPTED WATERS, ITS STRENGTH SLOWLY TURNED TO RUST
TAKE YOUR BELONGINGS AND LEAVE
LEAVE
FOR THE SAKE OF GENERATIONS FUTURE, IT IS TIME TO LET THE ROCK BELOW BE GIVEN TO THE PAST
LEAVE
I SPEAK TO YOU IN THE UNHEARD TONGUE OF INSISTENCE. HEED MY WORDS, BUT LET THEM THEN FALL FROM YOUR MEMORY
LEAVE.
IN ALL MY YEARS, I'VE NEVER SEEN SUCH EVIL
I SAW IT IN ILAHN'S EYES AND I SEE ITS WORKINGS IN THIS EXODUS
GAUGING FROM THE CANT OF OUR LAND, WE'RE STILL SHY OF THE NUMBER OF VESSELS WE'D NEED TO GET EVERYONE OFF THE ISLAND IN TIME

WHA ?
WHO ?
WE'RE NOT MOVING FAST ENOUGH, BUT IF I PUSH OUR SHIPS
SWIFT WINDS ARE OURS?
EVERY ONE LEFT BEHIND, I'VE KILLED
NO - THOSE NOT KILLED WILL BE SCATTERED AMONG THE OTHER ISLANDS!
TORBEL IS DEAD, TRUPERT
DEAD
ALL BECAUSE OF THAT POWER HUNGRY MADMAN

ILAHN OF CADADOR!
I SHOULD RECEIVE A REPORT AS SOON AS THE INEVITABLE OCCURS
NOK NOK
ENTER!
MINISTER ILAHN, I'LL REFRESHMENT YOU REQUESTED
THANK YOU LOROS!
YES
THANK YOU LOROS
YOU...!
STARS ABOVE!
FORGIVE ME MY MINISTER HAD NO IDEA!
OPEN YOUR EYES LOROS!
THERE'S NOTHING TO SEE
YOU NEEDN'T BE SO CRUEL TO LOROS, REESHA HE'S SENSITIVE
WEAK
WEAK

BUT YOU ARE STRONG
I MUST BE STRONG TO CONTROL DEMETRIA AND CRUSH SEPHIE'S REBELLION
ONCE TORBEL FALLS
THE OTHER ISLANDS WI RECONSIDER A PING HER
OR DEFYING ME

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Far away...

on the world of Demetria, explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

One of these islands is **Meridian**, home of shipbuilders and **Sephie**, the daughter of Minister Turos. Sephie's life has been spent being groomed to someday take over the ruling of Meridian. Her uncle **Ilahn** is the Minister of the rich city-state of Cadador, which controls most of the shipping and trade on Demetria.

When a mysterious force endows both brothers with the Sigil, a link to power, Turos (weakened by Ilahn's poisoning) dies, and his sigil is transferred to Sephie.

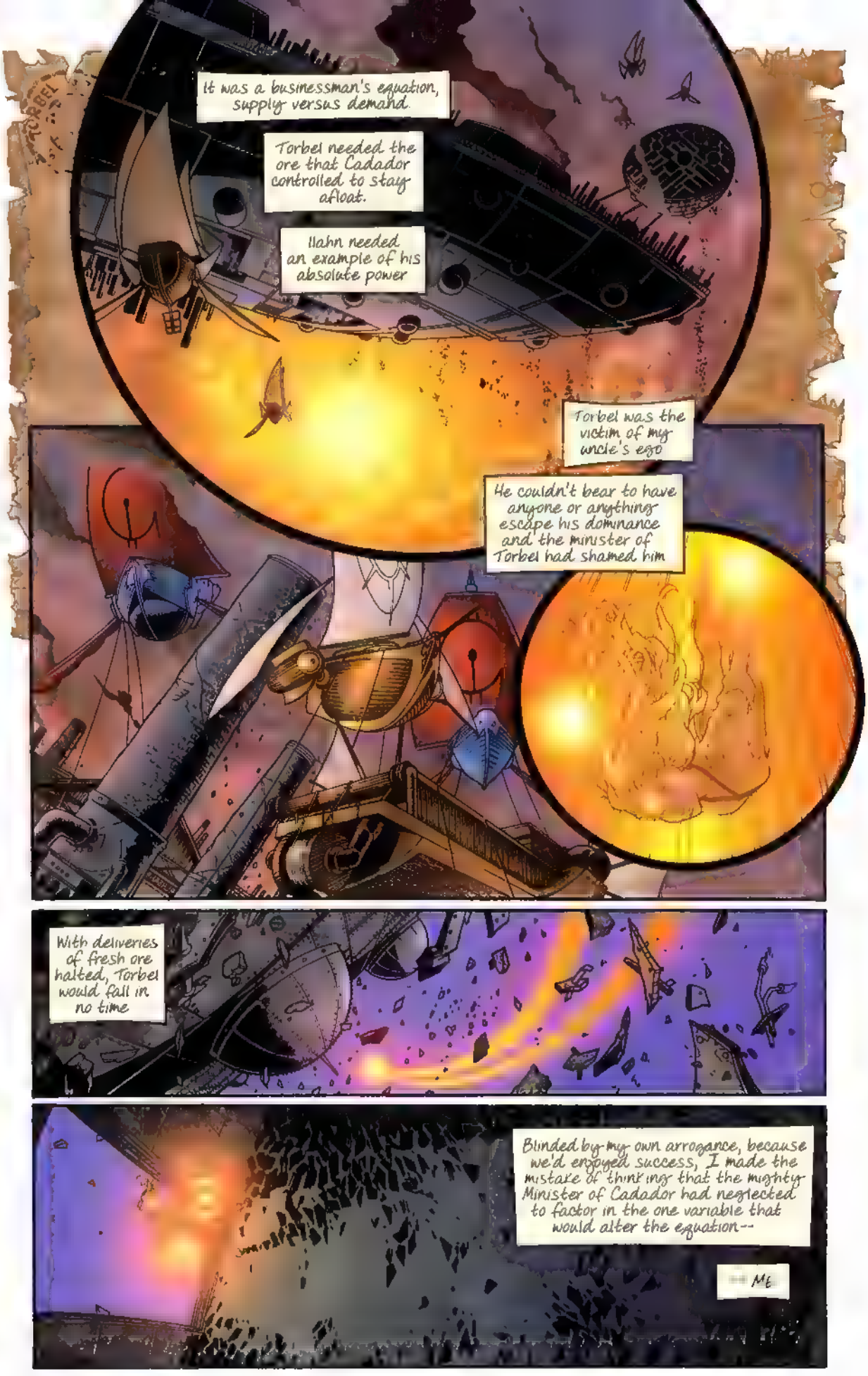
Ilahn gains the power to speed decay and create destruction. Sephie finds she has the power to force renewal, allowing her to heal, propel herself through the sky, and move things without touching them.

Ilahn tries, and fails, to control Sephie. Now he wants to gain control of all Demetria, beginning with his conquest of the island where he was born: Meridian.

Sephie's quest to rally support against Ilahn takes her to the waters surrounding Massintak, the step city, accompanied by a trio of loggers, a few caverns dwellers, and **Deren Beq**, whose stories of Sephie are outracing their flight, bringing them new volunteers. Sephie is reunited with **Jad**, who has brought a small crew from Hesperia because of a vision from the **Muse of Giatan**. Romance is blossoming between Sephie and Jad, although Jad's been warned against distracting her.

Sephie's pirates, aided by new inventions from Massintak, have been successfully harassing the ships on Cadador's trade route to prove Ilahn can be stopped. A messenger from the ironworking island of Torbel causes them to abandon their blockade and rush to the rescue.

Meanwhile, Ilahn, plotting with **Reesha** and **Rho Rhustane**, has sent Rho to Meridian to oversee the construction of a new ship and control the remaining population. Ilahn is enforcing the embargo on the ore that keeps Torbel aloft, dooming the heavy island.


It was a businessman's equation, supply versus demand.
Torbel needed the ore that Cadador controlled to stay afloat.
Ilahn needed an example of his absolute power
Torbel was the victim of my uncle's ego
He couldn't bear to have anyone or anything escape his dominance and the minister of Torbel had shamed him
With deliveries of fresh ore halted, Torbel would fall in no time
Blinded by my own arrogance, because we'd enjoyed success, I made the mistake of thinking that the mighty Minister of Cadador had neglected to factor in the one variable that would alter the equation--
ME

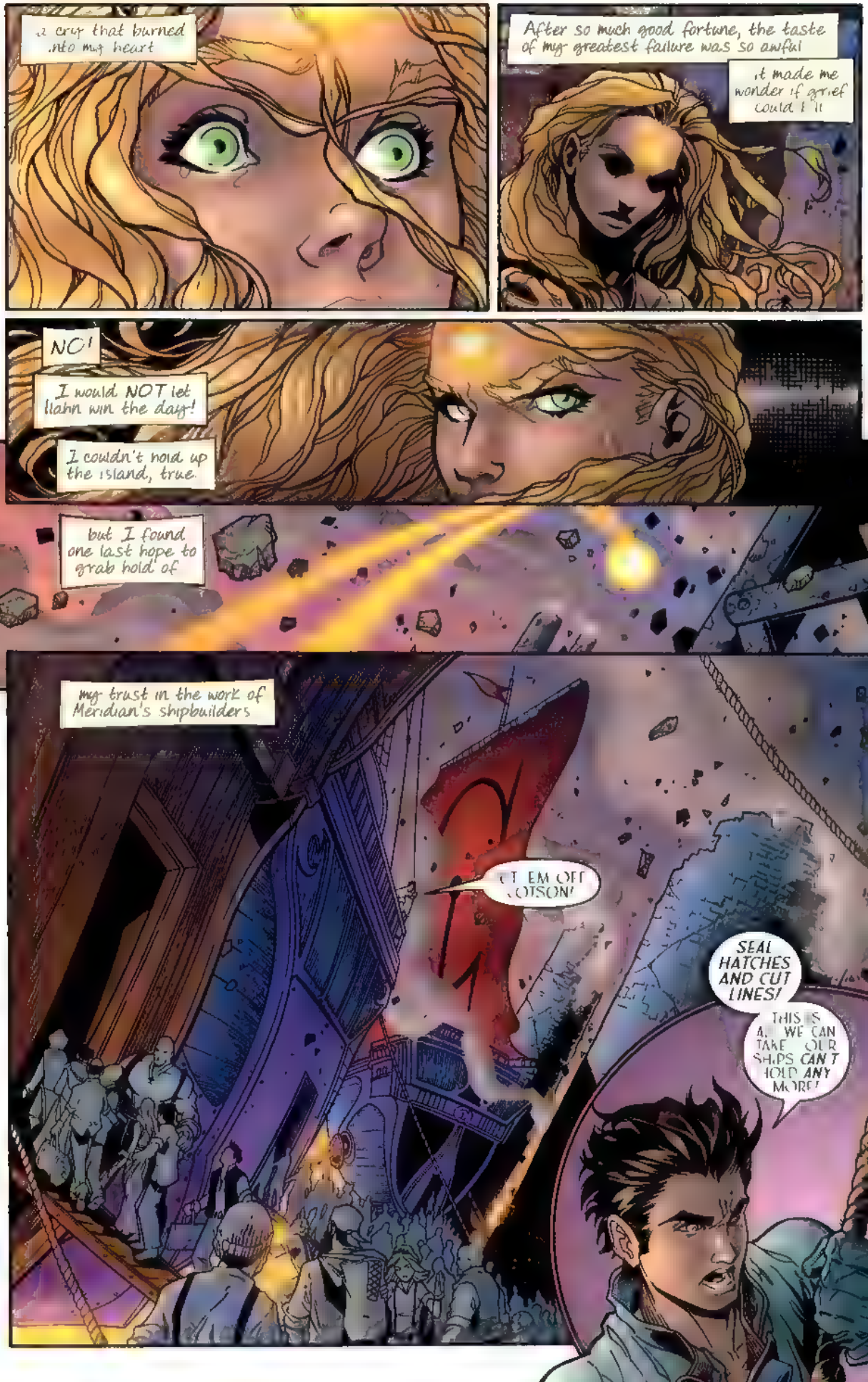
No ore, no buoyancy, no hope -- but the solution was so very clear to me
I could FIX things
I'd just renew what ore they had and Torbel would right itself
That would give her M.n.ster enough time to repair whatever negotiations that had gone awry to cause this mess
It was s. .mp.e!
TOO simple!

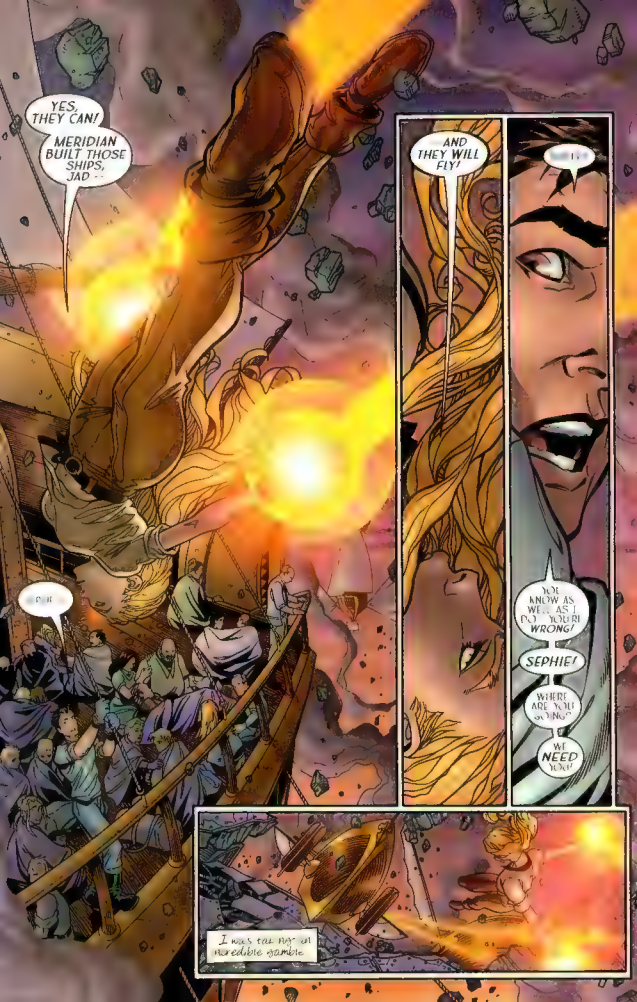
what I had neglected to factor in was TIME
KRA
THUM
Arbor was breaking up faster than I could repair it
I had to abandon my plan
and I had no other
I imagined papa's howl of dismay...
"A wise Minister always has a second route in mind if Nature fouls the first trail!"
My trail was well and truly fouled

My little pirate force, heady from our triumphant disruption of Cadador's trade routes, was bravely helping avert what we could of Torbel's fate
They were scattered among the panicked citizens, helping to lead them to ships that would carry them away from their home forever
I knew how painful it was to leave home behind
our world is old, dying, and her resources are thinning
The harassment of Ilahn's ships was meant to bring necessary change to trade, not cost lives
But Ilahn's lust for power had grown since we were both marked with sigils
He'd been offended at the business table and threatened by me, so he made good on his threat to cut off Torbel's ore
Would he have done this if we hadn't blockaded his ships?
Were we to blame for this tragedy?
Poor Torbel -- having to pay the price.
Down in the Caverns, Dren and Cereg were part of a secret team working to save Demetria
They had joined me to spread the word of dissent and the hint of hope
But now
SEPHIE!
CAN YOU SEE --?
WHERE
WHERE DO WE PLACE THE DEAD?
PUT THEM DOWN!
THE DAMAGE IS TOO SEVERE
TORBEL IS GOING TO FALL
THE DEAD WILL BE BURIED AT SEA
--SAVE THE LIVING!

I had failed
My sense of hope dimmed with I spotted my closest friends
Paredevil Deren proved the impossible was only a hindrance
Jad's fierce heart kept him fighting to save as many lives as possible
Although some couldn't be saved
I think Cotson took each tragedy the hardest
Much of that day has become just a blur of pushing, grabbing, handing off while trapped in the vortex of one thought over and over
THERE'S TOO MANY!
ENOUGH!
I'VE GOT TO DO MORE!
SEPHIE!
CALM DOWN!
DO MORE?
CAN YOU HIT THE WHOLE ISLAND?
NO! SO STOP MOANING AND DO WHAT EVERYONE ELSE IS
ALL YOU CAN!
KRRAAKK

Ships full of refugees left port and were replaced by more coming from far cities to help, but it wasn't enough
The island still held too many people
Torbei was dying and hundreds of people were going to join her if I couldn't invent a solution
Then, with a stomach wrenching shudder and a terrifying lurch Torbei GROANED
The soul-chilling sound, harbinger of death, was echoed by everyone


a cry that burned into my heart
After so much good fortune, the taste of my greatest failure was so awful
it made me wonder if grief could kill
NO!
I would NOT let Ilahn win the day!
I couldn't hold up the island, true
but I found one last hope to grab hold of
my trust in the work of Meridian's shipbuilders
GET 'EM OFF JOTSON!
SEAL HATCHES AND CUT LINES!
THIS IS ALL WE CAN TAKE. OUR SHIPS CAN'T HOLD ANY MORE!



YES, THEY CAN!

MERIDIAN BUILT THOSE SHIPS, JAD --

AND THEY WILL FLY!

YOU KNOW AS WELL AS I DO... YOU'RE WRONG!

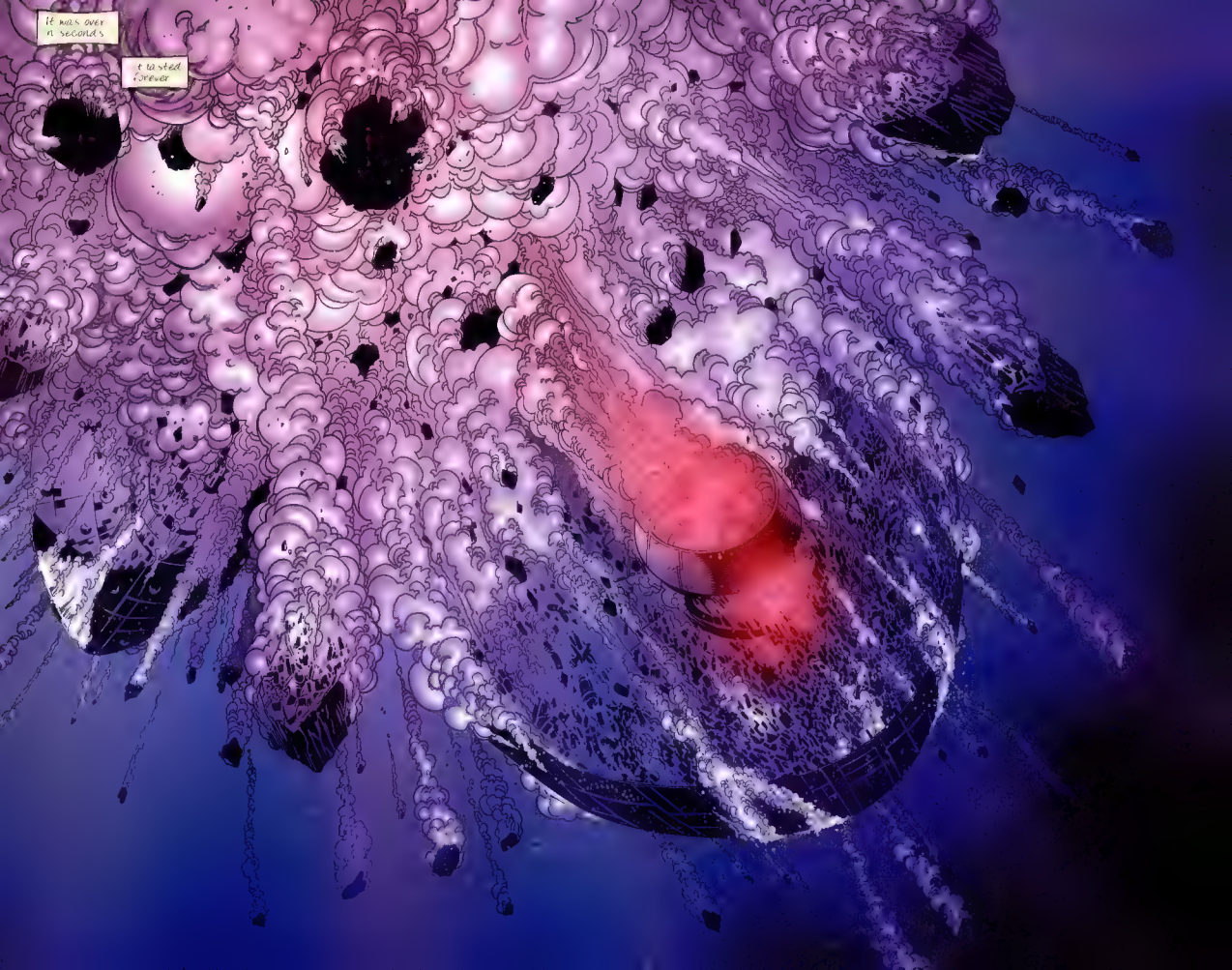
SEPHIE!

WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

WE NEED YOU!

I was taking an incredible gamble

A minuscule rise in light of Torben's fate
As I watched, knowing I had been too late
Torben fell


It was over in seconds
It lasted forever

Not that I SAW it
I SENSED it through new methods of perception that were opening up in me
Each spirit has a light, a presence
and I could FEEL them all around me
...me became stronger as suddenly came
GASP!
...evers faded as they left their bodies and drifted off to join the stars
...IFE flowed all around me as I concentrated, shoving aside the pain of my exertion so I could focus on my task
I couldn't lift Torbel, but the SHIPS
overloaded beyond their capacity, they still remained whole so I only had to help them, not carry them
to the nearest safe ground, Massneat

I reached the step islands in a blur of pain
My fault
ILAHN'S fault
Torbei didn't have to fall!
SEPHIE!
EVERYONE'S OFF! WE CAN GO BACK FOR
SEPHIE!
but I had nothing left to give them

SEPHIE!
SEPHIE!
CAN'T

But it wasn't yet my time to join the stars
Instead, I was touched by a strange presence
A man?
Woman?
A person who brought to mind Gnetan of the forests and the troubling Muse of Guatan
Was he both? Neither?
I was given a glimpse of some purpose this being had in mind for me, but the details are now gone
It may have been a dream, but the glowing touch of his hand brought me back to clarity again
whole

CONTINUE BOSCAU
AN ESTIMATE OF SURVIVORS PUTS THE TOTAL AT ROUGHLY HALF OF TORBEL'S POPULATION
THEY WERE BORNE AWAY BY SHIPS PROPELLED BY THE MINISTER OF MERIDIAN
SO TORBEL HAS FALLEN
AFTER EXTENDING HERSELF SO COMPLETELY SEPHIE WILL BE TIRED
SHE WILL TEND TO TORBEL'S SURVIVORS SAPPING HER FURTHER
HER FOLLOWERS WILL ALSO BE FATIGUED
READY MY ARMADA BOSCAU
NOW IS THE TIME TO
STRIKE!

AND WHAT HAPPENED TO TORBEL CANNOT BE FORGIVEN OR FORGOTTEN!
WITH HIS CALLOUS CONDEMNATION OF THAT CITY, ILAHN HAS CROSSED THE LINE FROM GREED INTO VILLAINY.
WE MUST LEAVE BEHIND OUR INNOCENCE! WE CAN NO LONGER IGNORE HIS EVIL!
ILAHN IS NO LONGER TO BE DEFIED BUT TO BE DESTROYED!
Our raids may have inspired Ilahn to down Torbel, but the decision -- and the responsibility -- are HIS.
Mine was to take em outrage I felt and turn it into ACTION!

The CrossGen Universe created by Mark Alessi & Gina M. Villa

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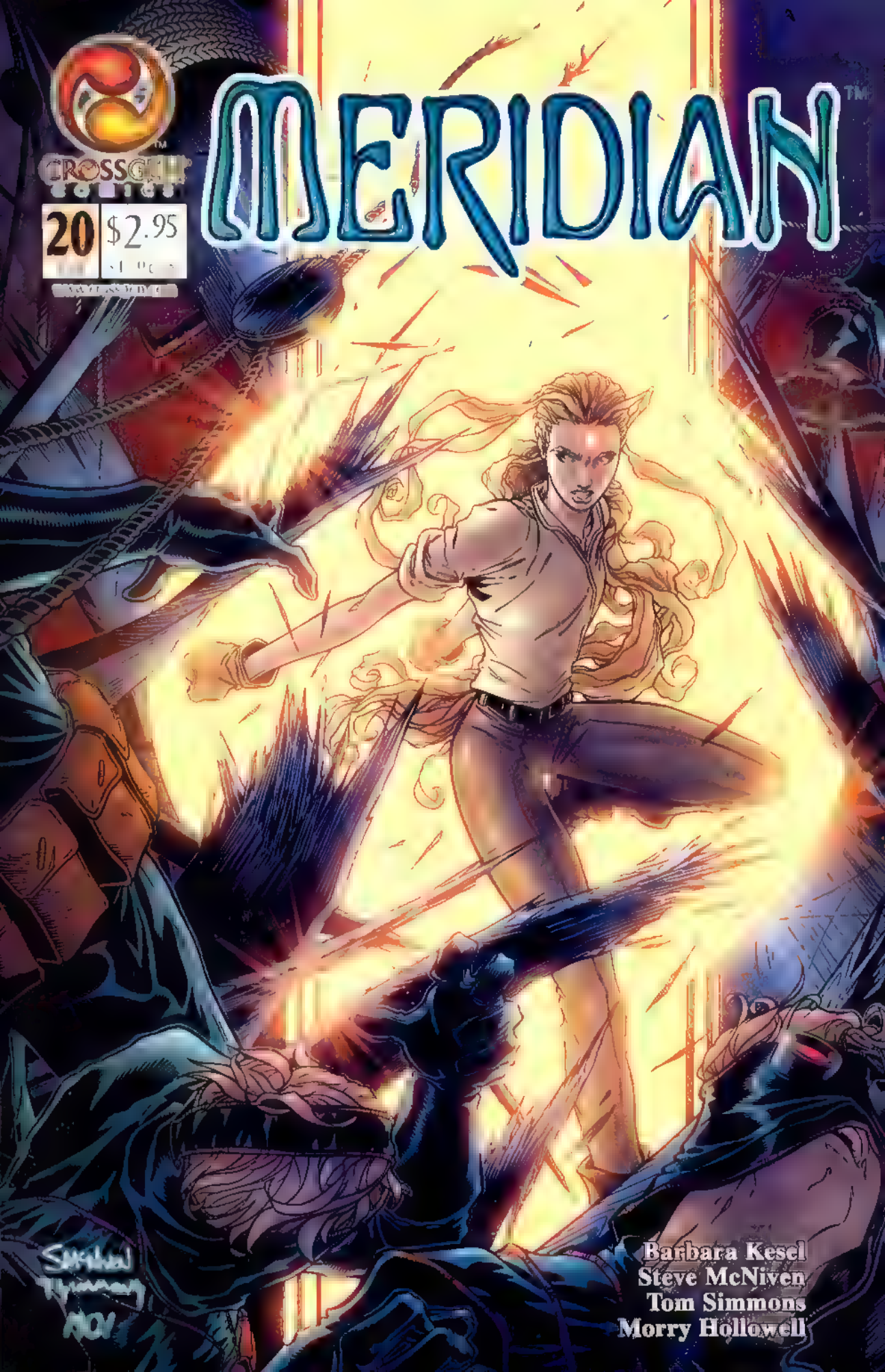
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Ilahn, on his way to Meridian with **Reesha,** hears the news of Torbel and orders his forces to strike. **Rho Rhustane,** sent to Meridian to oversee the building of a new ship, has added his own special enhancements to its construction.

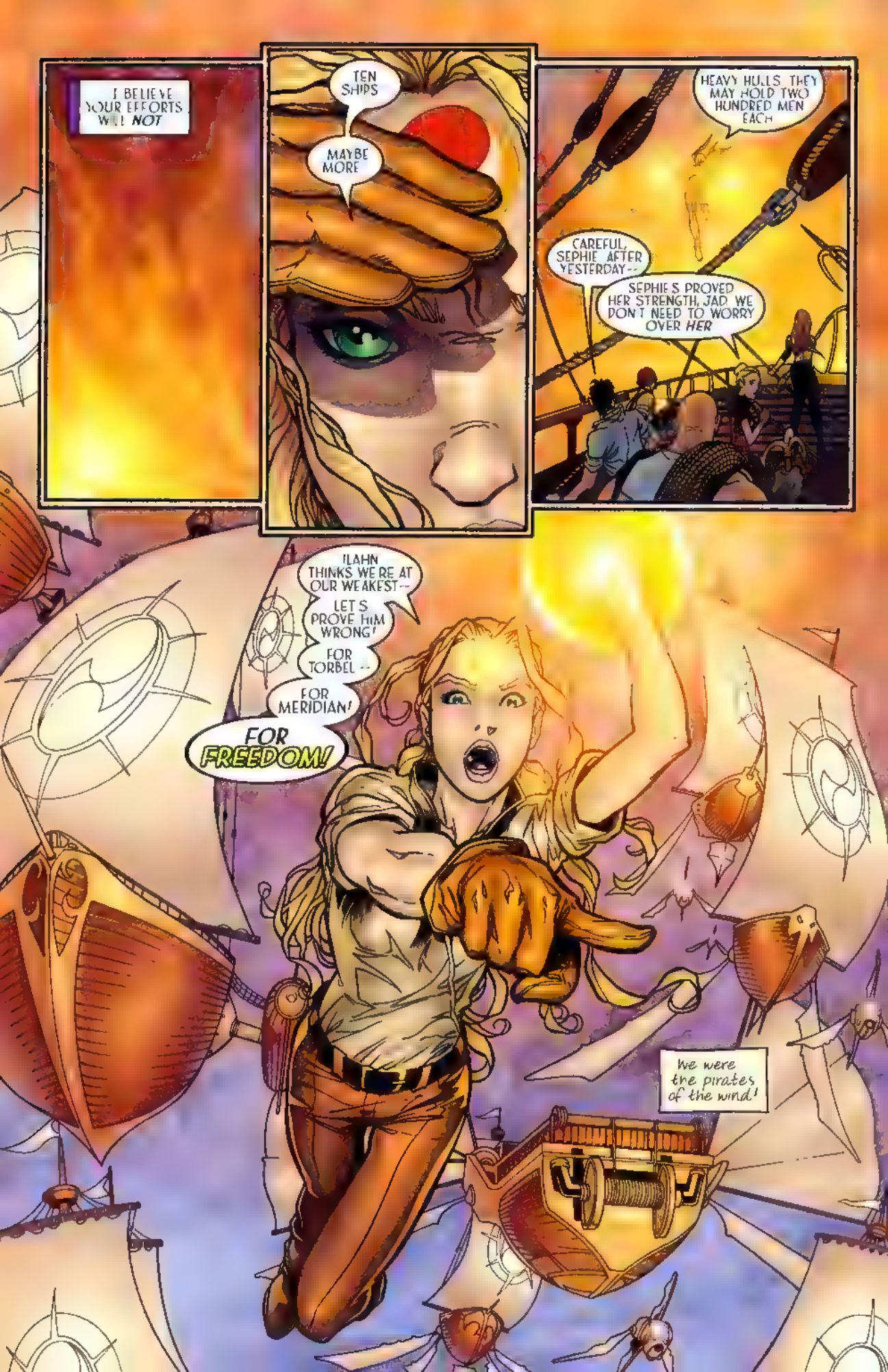
Jnx Scanz HaCsA !!!

Torbel had fallen
There were too many bodies to make biers for all and not enough land to hold them
So, against my natural instincts, I sacrificed a captured ship
As we stood watch through the long night, the offspring of Meridian's shipbuilding labors embarked on its final journey, bravely bearing away Torbel's dead to the site of the previous day's tragedy
Meridian's way is to send our ashes to the wind
let them be swept away on the currents of the air
GOOD JOURNEY, MY FRIENDS

But the tradition of the people of Torbel has always been to offer their ashes to the waves of the sea.
We sent the last of Torbel's victims to join them doomed city.
Freeing their spirit to become new stars in the night sky.

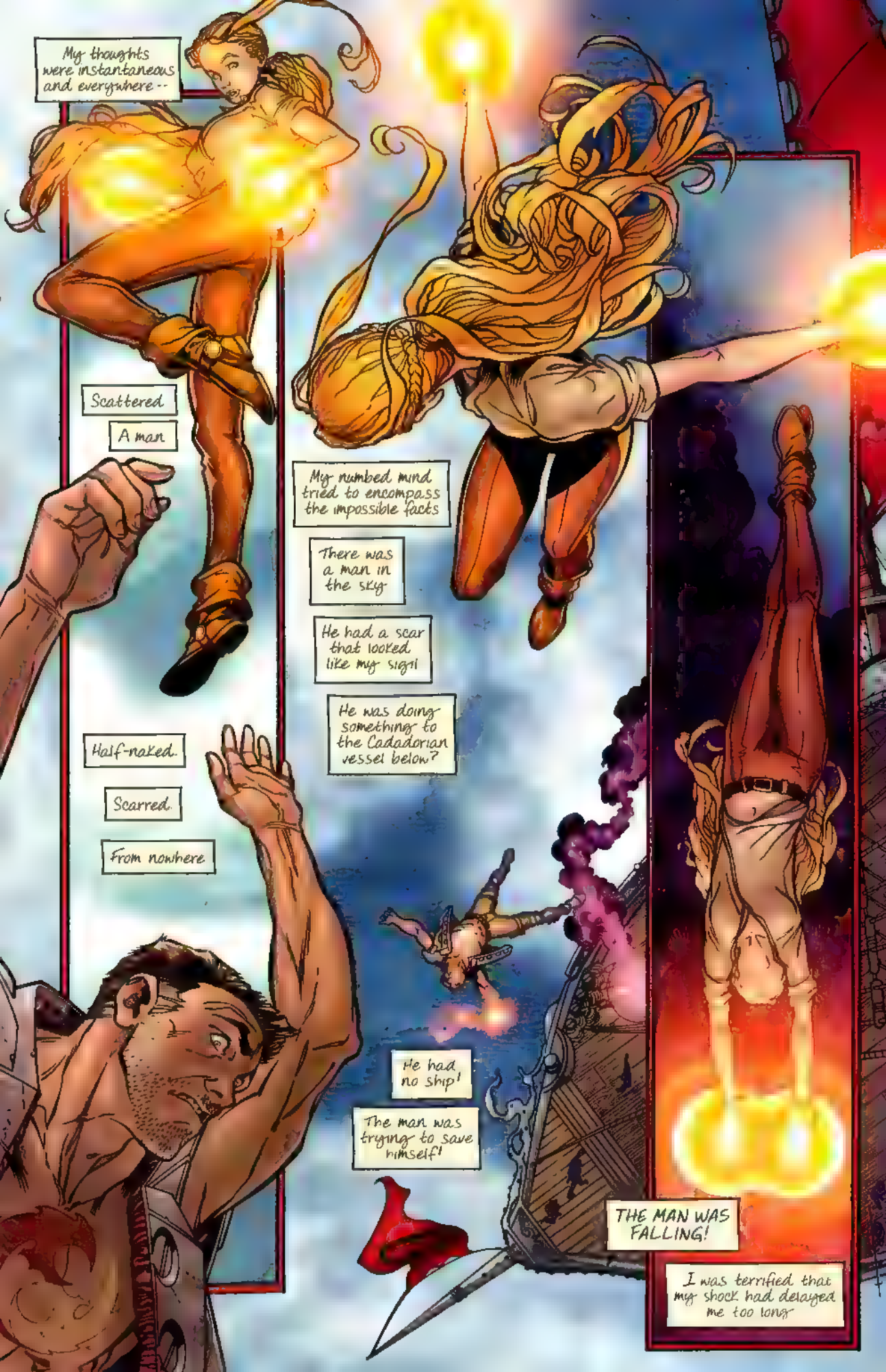
I hope they will be watching down from the sky when we punish Ilahn for this crime
TEN SHIPS
MAYB MOR
CAPTAIN PATIENCE
CONTINUE AS WE ARE SHULDER
WE'LL BE ON THEM BY MID-MORNING
TIME ENOUGH TO BRING THE HAMMER OF CADADOR'S MIGHT
TO BEAR AGAINST OUR REBELLIOUS COUSINS

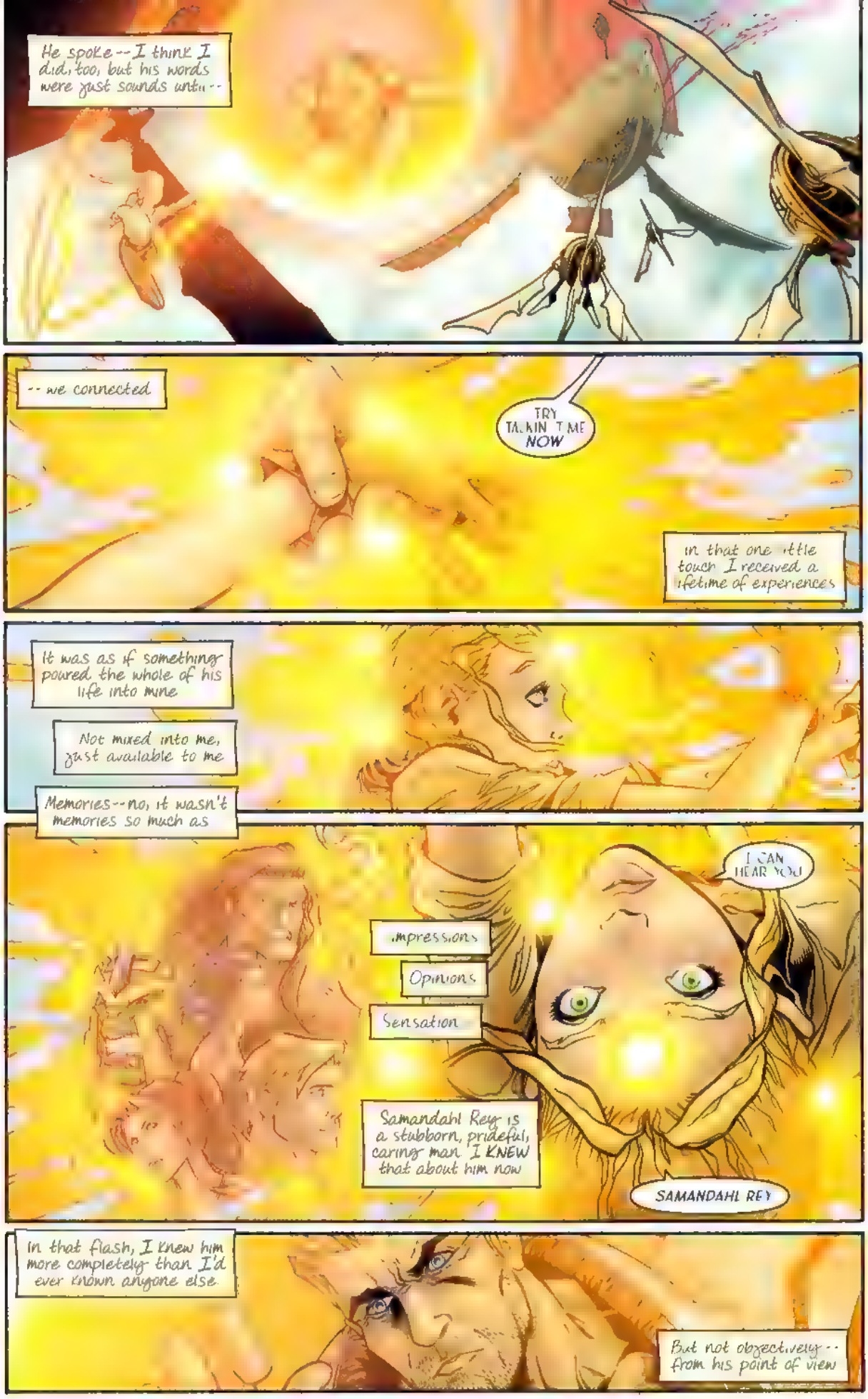
MERIDIAN IS JUST AS QUAINT AS YOU DESCRIBED IT, ILAHN
BACKWARD, YOU MEAN
I'VE ONLY JUST BEGUN ITS EVENTUAL TRANSFORMATION
SOON, REESHA THIS ISLAND WILL BE THE MODEL OF CIVILIZATION
NOT A TIRESOME REMINDER OF DAYS LONG GONE
MINISTER ILAHN!
MISTRESS REESHA!
WE'RE AWARE OF WHO WE ARE, RHO RHUSTANE
YOU DENY US ENTRANCE IS THERE NO PROGRESS ON THE SHIP?
I AM CERTAIN THERE IS ILAHN WHO UNDERSTANDS THE COST OF FAILING YOU
MY LADY REESHA - WHO MIGHT REMEMBER SHE ENJOYS A POWER BESTOWED BY ME - IS QUITE CORRECT
I WOULDN'T DREAM OF DISAPPOINTING CAPADOR'S MINISTER
LOOK FOR YOURSELVES
MMM
RHO RHUSTANE MAY HAVE UNDER ESTIMATED YOU
SHOULD MY ARMADA PROVE INEFFECTIVE AGAINST SEPHES RAGTAG REBELLION

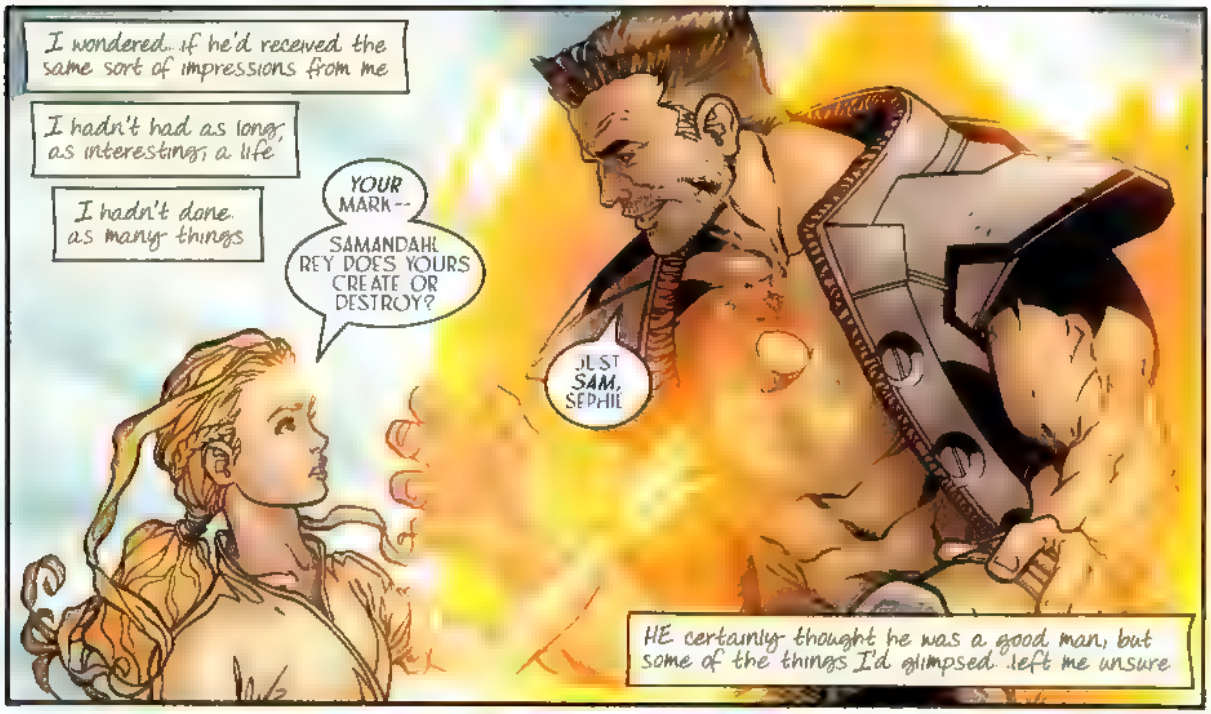

I BELIEVE YOUR EFFORTS WILL NOT
TEN SHIPS
MAYBE MORE
HEAVY HULLS THEY MAY HOLD TWO HUNDRED MEN EACH
CAREFUL, SEPHIE AFTER YESTERDAY--
SEPHIE'S PROVED HER STRENGTH, JAD WE DON'T NEED TO WORRY OVER HER
!LAHN THINKS WE'RE AT OUR WEAKEST--
LET'S PROVE HIM WRONG!
FOR TORBEL --
FOR MERIDIAN!
FOR FREEDOM!
We were the pirates of the wind!

The mourners of Torbel's dead
The unifiers of Demetria's living!
The avenging furies racing to meet the Cadadorian fleet our scouts had sighted --
-- the disruptors of trade out to break Ilahn's absolute control and bring back equitable trade between cities on both sea and ground!
We fought with a certainty of purpose fueled by Torbel's demise!

As we commandeered each ship
the advantage my power afforded us made capturing the vital points nearly painless.
until the smooth sailing of our battle was suddenly disrupted
by a man who APPEARED in the sky
A MAN--
--who just --
--APPEARED--
--in the sky!


My thoughts were instantaneous and everywhere --
Scattered
A man
Half-naked.
Scarred.
From nowhere
My numbed mind tried to encompass the impossible facts
There was a man in the sky
He had a scar that looked like my sign!
He was doing something to the Cadadorian vessel below?
He had no ship!
The man was trying to save himself!
THE MAN WAS FALLING!
I was terrified that my shock had delayed me too long


He spoke--I think I did, too, but his words were just sounds until--
--we connected
TRY TALKIN' TO ME NOW
In that one little touch I received a lifetime of experiences
It was as if something poured the whole of his life into mine
Not mixed into me, just available to me
Memories--no, it wasn't memories so much as
I CAN HEAR YOU
impressions
Opinions
Sensation
Samandahl Rey is a stubborn, prideful, caring man. I KNEW that about him now
SAMANDAHL REY
In that flash, I knew him more completely than I'd ever known anyone else
But not objectively--from his point of view


I wondered... if he'd received the same sort of impressions from me
I hadn't had as long, as interesting, a life
I hadn't done as many things
YOUR MARK--
SAMANDAHL REY DOES YOURS CREATE OR DESTROY?
JUST SAM, SEPHIE
HE certainly thought he was a good man, but some of the things I'd glimpsed left me unsure

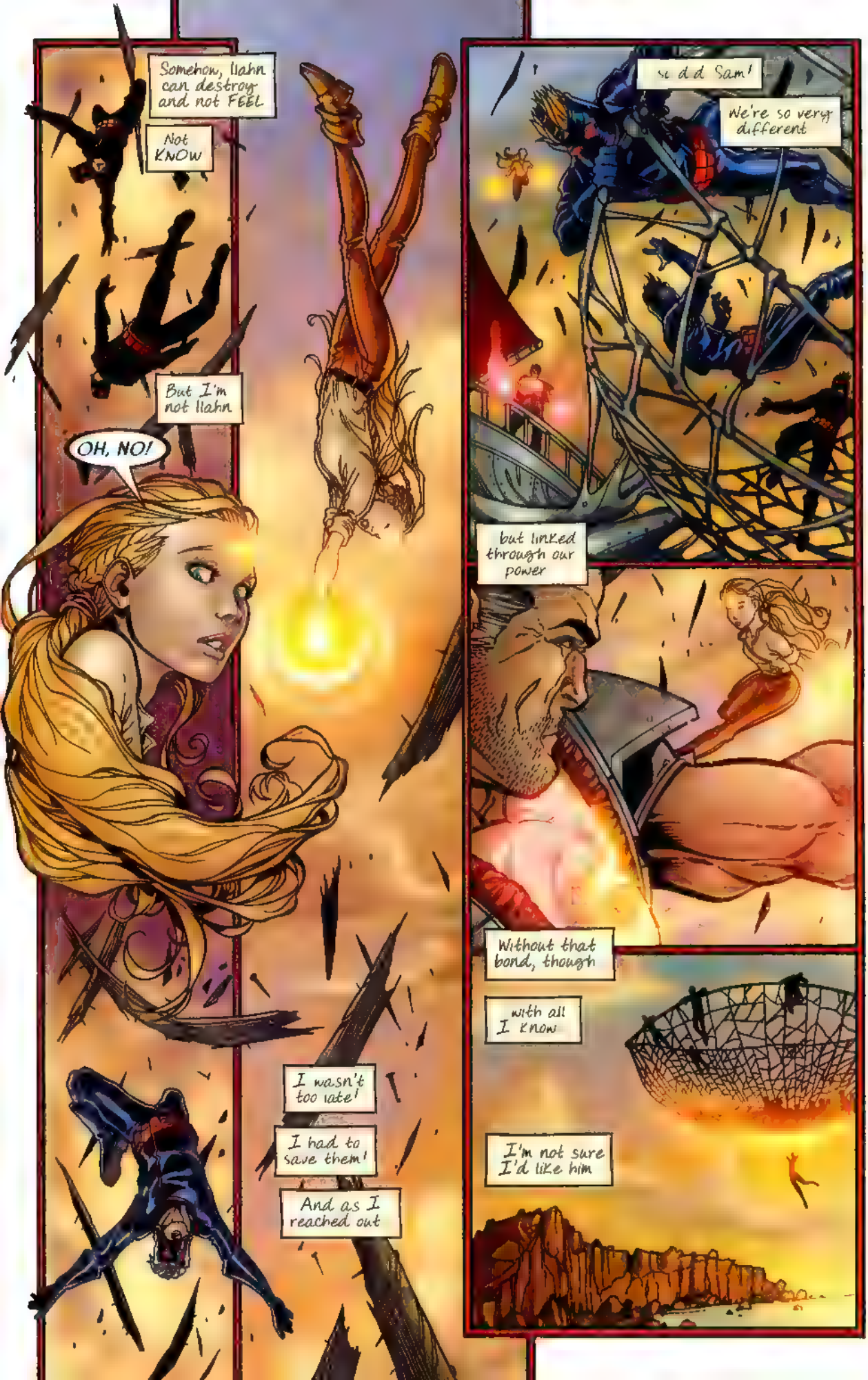
AN' I D HAVETA SAY DESTRUCTION'S MY SPECIALTY
HELPING OUT IS, TOO, AN' IT LOOKS LIKE YOUR TEAM'S LOSIN
C N I HELP?
I was torn, because ILAHN believes himself to be a good man
Sam's power seemed to be more like Ilahn's than mine. It occurred to me that he might more naturally side with my uncle
But my strongest impression was of a good heart

I decided to trust that he wouldn't hurt us
THAT SHIP... IT CARRIES A SKYFIRE LAUNCHER
IF YOU CAN DISABLE IT, YOU'LL PROTECT MY SHIPS

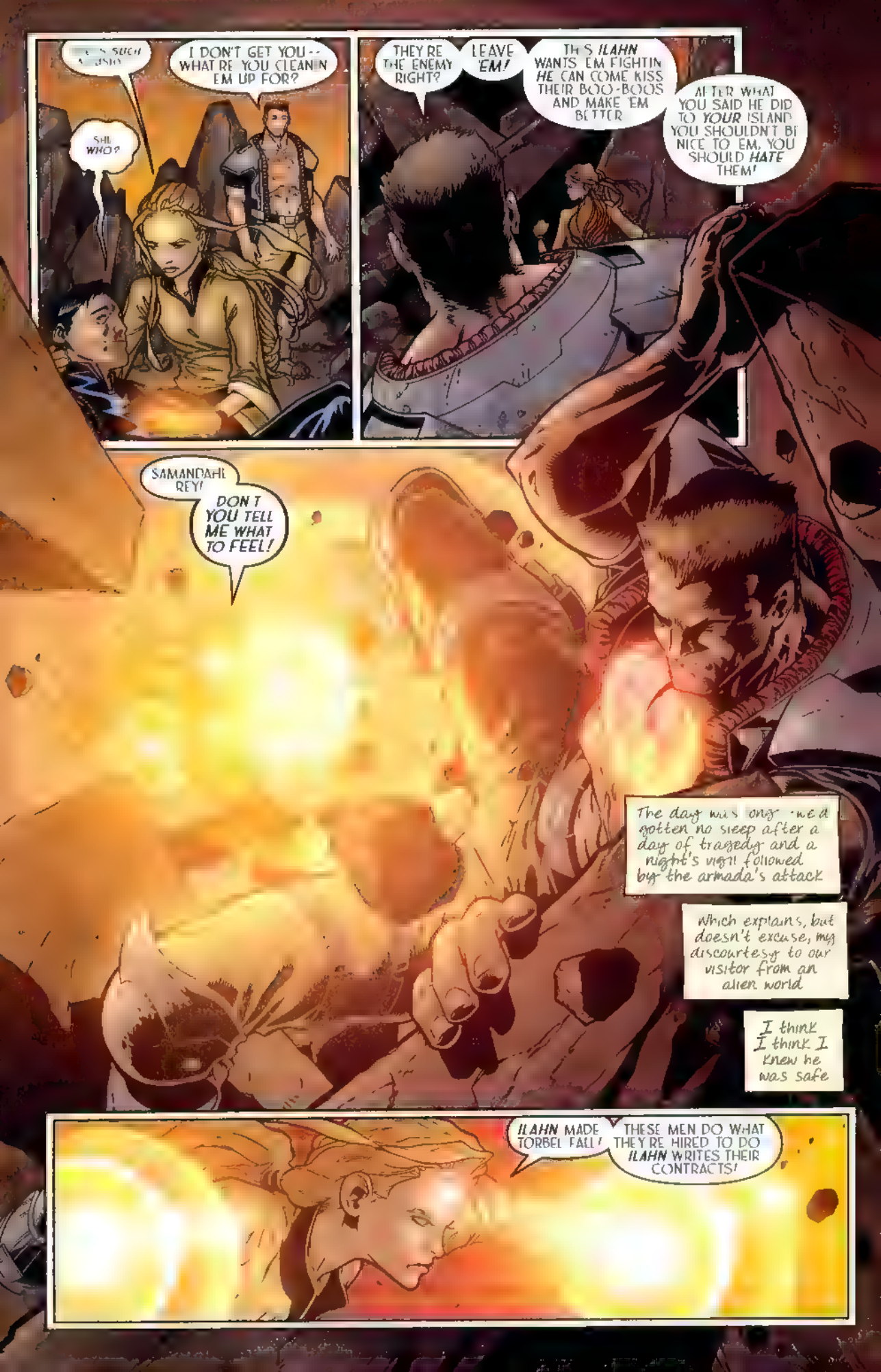
And yet
when given a simple assignment
he chose the most catastrophic interpretation
I was suddenly afraid that this stranger held no reverence for life
NOOO!
YOU CAN'T JUST KILL THEM!
WHAT KIND OF WAR YOU RUNNIN HERE LITTLE GIRL?
OR IS THIS JUST SOME GAME T YOU?
CAUSE IF IT'S NOT, YOU'RE NOT FIGHTING T WIN IT
From our rapport I knew Sam had seen more real warfare than me
Which is why it made me so MAD to recognize that he was RIGHT!

Sam's stunt bought us some time as both armies paused to assess
We'd issued our usual ultimatum and invitation, but these Cadadorians weren't interested in surrender
Neither was I, even though Sam continued to malign my battle technique
He considered us amateur
YOU GOTTA SHOW EM YOU MEAN BUSINESS!
TAKE SOMETHIN' THIS LAHN WANTS AND BLOW IT UP!
THOSE SHIPS THEY'RE VALUABLE TO HIM RIGHT?
Again...he was right, but
I'M GLAD NO ONE ELSE CAN UNDERSTAND YOUR RIDICULOUS PLAN!
I CAN'T BLOW UP HIS SHIPS!
THE SAILORS ABOARD THEM WOULD DIE!
AN WE CAN'T HAVE THAT!
EXCUSE ME! I THOUGHT YOU SAID HE DROPPED A WHOLE ISLAND?
SOUNDS T ME LIKE PEOPLE ARE ALREADY DYING!
YOU GONNA END THIS OR YOU GONNA STAY PRETTY?
SKYFIRE!
It WASN'T his WORDS that changed me
It wasn't the ways they made my jaw set
Because he WAS right!
The Cadadorians decided it for me
They attacked

and I chose to answer in kind
SURPRISE!
I was aggressive
Destructive
FIERCE!
And even though it halted the battle INSTANTLY, it felt
wrong
After Torbel, I thought this would be easy
Just DESTROY
But I can FEEL them.
I CAN'T stop caring


Somehow, Ilahn can destroy and not FEEL
Not KNOW
But I'm not Ilahn
OH, NO!
I wasn't too late!
I had to save them!
And as I reached out
Sadd Sam!
We're so very different
but linked through our power
Without that bond, though
with all I know
I'm not sure I'd like him

Despite our efforts, so many soldiers were injured
Those Cadadorians who didn't join us were allowed to head their ships home to spread the word
We ferried the wounded to the rocky coast below
As I said, I can't stop feeling
The only way to make my pain go away was to do the same for theirs
HERE
WYNTREN SAID THESE WERE FOR YOU
NAUK?
I DON'T NEED TO
HOW THOUGHTFUL, NAUK
SHE'S VERY GRATEFUL
THANK YOU
PERRIN I DON'T NEED CLEAN CLOTHES! I CAN JUST FIX MINE
ACCEPT THE GIFT SEPHIE
AREN'T YOU THE MINISTER OF MERIDIANS? SHOULDN'T YOU KNOW THE BASICS OF STRATEGY?
NOW IS NO TIME TO LEAVE SMALL COURTESIES UNREWARDED
THIS IS A WASTE OF TIME! I SHOULD BE -
GETTING MANGED!
AND QUICKLY
THERE ARE INJURED MEN HERE, SEPHIE
DON'T TEND TO THEM STINKING OF DEATH


I DON'T GET YOU-- WHAT RE YOU CLEANIN EM UP FOR?
SHE WHO?
THEY RE THE ENEMY RIGHT?
LEAVE 'EM!
TH S ILAHN WANTS EM FIGHTIN HE CAN COME KISS THEIR BOO-BOOS AND MAKE 'EM BETTER
AFTER WHAT YOU SAID HE DID TO YOUR ISLAND YOU SHOULDN'T BI NICE TO EM. YOU SHOULD HATE THEM!
SAMANDAHL REY!
DON T YOU TELL ME WHAT TO FEEL!
The day was only -we'd gotten no sleep after a day of tragedy and a night's vigil followed by the armada's attack
Which explains, but doesn't excuse, my discourtesy to our visitor from an alien world
I think I think I knew he was safe
ILAHN MADE TORBEL FALL!
THESE MEN DO WHAT THEY'RE HIRED TO DO ILAHN WRITES THEIR CONTRACTS!

THEY'RE JUST TRYING TO MAKE THEIR WAY IN THE SKY! THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT ILAHN'S TRULY UP TO --
CAN'T YOU SEE HOW MANY HAVE JOINED US? ONCE THEY REALIZE!
HOW DARE YOU JUDGE ME
OR THEM!
I was angrier than I can ever remember being
YOU AREN'T EVEN FROM MY WORLD!
HOW DARE YOU--
HOW DARE YOU!
OH!
My trade disintegrated when I caught notice of Sam's reaction
He was laughing at me
He was LAUGHING at me
HE WAS LAUGHING AT ME
YOU GO ON
SOUNDS LIKE YOU NEED A SAFE EAR TO DROP SOME HARSH WORDS INSIDE OF
If my attack was FUNNY, his world must be a TERRIBLE place
DON'T GET MAD MUCH DO YOU?
YOU'RE NOT VERY GOOD AT IT
MY PAL ROJA COULDA RIPPED BOTH A MY EARS CLEAN OFF BY NOW
GO AHEAD YOU'RE TIRED AND UPSET LET IT ALL OUT
He comes from ANOTHER WORLD!
There are other worlds
with other people
OH!
FORGIVE ME, SAMANDAHI REY!
IF YOU KNEW MY UNCLE
HE'S LIKE US MARKED BUT HE'S NOT LIKE US AT ALL

I HAVE WORK TO DO
BETTER GET THOSE BANDAGES MOVIN ALTHOUGH IT LOOKS TOO LATE FOR THAT PAIR
NOT THIS ONE
CAN'T YOU FEEL IT?
HE'S NOT GONE YET
IT'S WAR WOLF GOTTA LIVE WITH SOME LOSSES
NO!
I CAN HEAL AS MANY AS I HAVE TO!
H HEAL?
WHAT RE YOU DOIN TO EM SEPHIE?
JUST FIXING THEIR WOUNDS.
HOW?!
HOW D YOU DO THAT?
I JUST TOUCH WHERE IT'S GONE WRONG ON THE INSIDE AND PUSH IT UNTIL IT'S WORKING AGAIN
IT'S TOO LATE IF THE SPIRIT INSIDE HAS ALREADY ESCAPED TO JOIN THE STARS, BUT AS YOU CAN PROBABLY FEEL HIS WAS STILL THERE

NO, I CAN'T FEEL IF THE SPIRIT'S STILL ROIYA!
SAM DID I UPSET YOU?
I--I JUST ASSUMED YOU KNEW THERE'S A SPIRIT INSIDE OUR BODIES
NAH, IT'S NOT YOU
IT'S--I GOTTA GET HOME YOU SEE, I'VE GOT A FRIEND WHO NEEDS T BE FIXED LIKE YOU SAY
I GOTTA DO THIS FOR HER
I must have offended him
Even though he protested otherwise
I UNDER STAND?
I GOTTA GO HOME
HOME
THAT'S IT SEPHIE HOME REMEMBER THAT
he left as suddenly as he had appeared
YOU FIND THAT ILAHN AND KICK HIM ONE FOR ME, YOU GOT IT?
Going back, I assume to the world from which he'd come
I.I DO THAT
GOOD JOURNEY SAMANDAHL REY
SAM

Leaving me wondering if that would happen to me.
Would I suddenly leave Demetria -- appear on another world?
Could it happen?
In that chilling moment, as I considered yesterday's vision, today's visitor, and what both meant
I realized my world had been changed
I was marked, different, but not tied to Dahn alone
There were others like us
on other worlds
Our sun itself is only a star in someone else's sky
But if the stars are the spirits of our dead
FIRE.
where do the spirit of THEIR dead go?

KRAKOOM
FWAAASH
My thoughts were interrupted by another surprise
We were exhausted disheartened and unprepared
for a danger Demetria had never known
My world had indeed changed forever

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Far away...

on the world of Demetria, explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

One of these islands is **Meridian**, home of shipbuilders and **Sephie**, the daughter of Minister Turos. Sephie's life has been spent being groomed to someday take over the ruling of Meridian. Her uncle **Ilahn** is the Minister of the rich city-state of Cadador, which controls most of the shipping and trade on Demetria.

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Ilahn tries, and fails, to control Sephie. Now he wants to gain control of all Demetria, beginning with his conquest of the island where he was born: Meridian.

Sephie's quest to rally support against Ilahn takes her to the waters surrounding Massintak, the step city, accompanied by a trio of loggers, a few caverns dwellers, and **Deren Beq**, whose stories of Sephie are outracing their flight, bringing them new volunteers. Sephie is reunited with **Jad**, who has brought a small crew from Hesperia because of a vision from the **Muse of Giatan**. Romance is blossoming between Sephie and Jad, although Jad's been warned against distracting her.

Sephie's pirates, aided by new inventions from Massintak, have been successfully harassing the ships on Cadador's trade route to prove Ilahn can be stopped. A messenger from the ironworking island of Torbel causes the pirates to abandon their blockade and rush to help, but they arrive too late to save the island. They can only help with the evacuation until Torbel falls into the sea below with great loss of life.

Ilahn, on his way to Meridian with **Reesha**, hears the news of Torbel and orders his forces to strike. **Rho Rhustane**, sent to Meridian to oversee the building of a new ship, has added his own special enhancements to its construction.

While fighting the Cadadorian armada, Sephie is surprised by a visit from another Sigil-Bearer, Samandahl Rey. Empathically connecting with him, she gains Sam's memories and knowledge before he disappears again...

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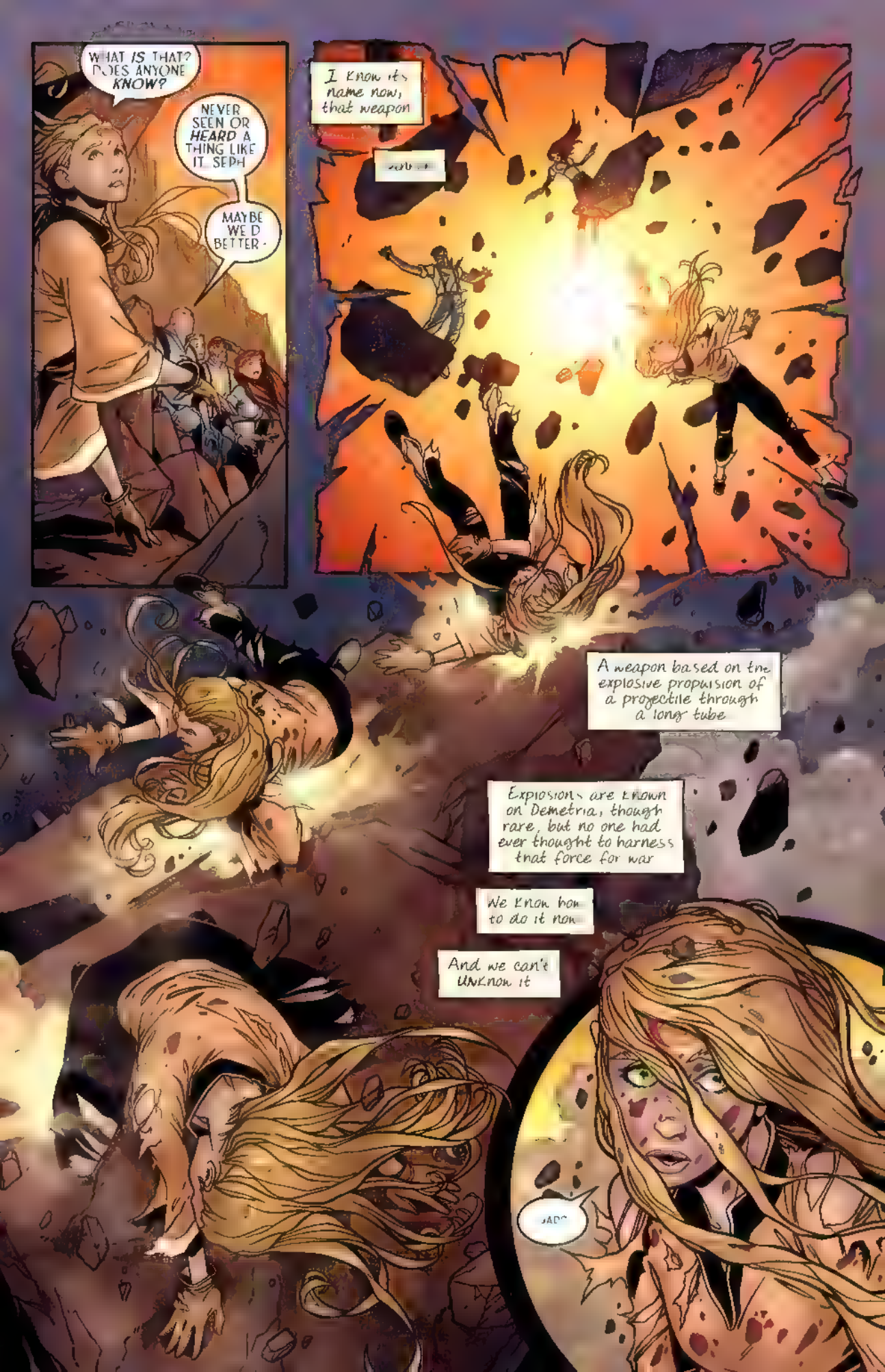
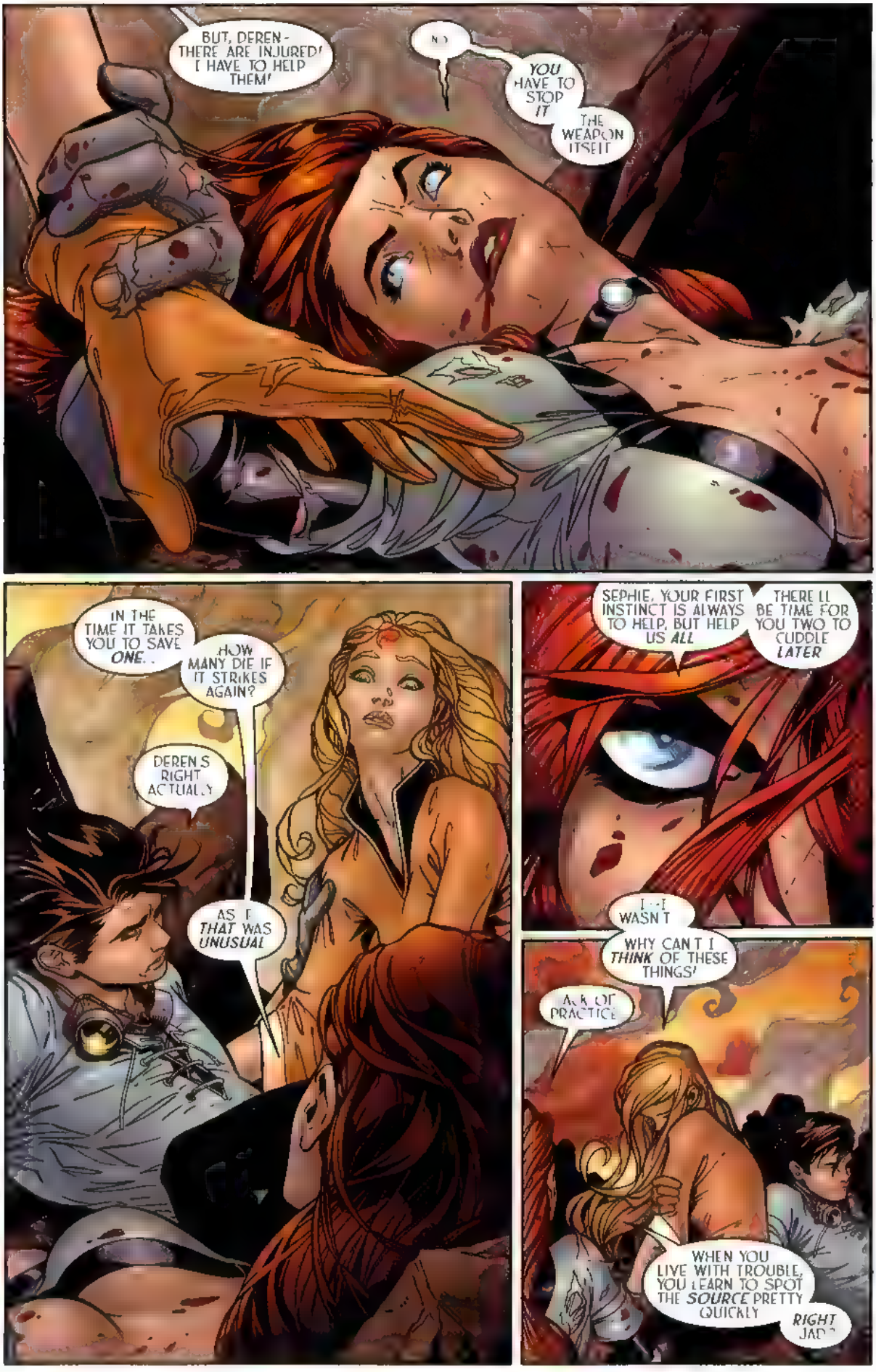

WHAT IS THAT? DOES ANYONE KNOW?
NEVER SEEN OR HEARD A THING LIKE IT, SEPH
MAYBE WE'D BETTER -
I know its name now, that weapon
A weapon based on the explosive propulsion of a projectile through a long tube
Explosions are known on Demetria, though rare, but no one had ever thought to harness that force for war
We know how to do it now
And we can't UNknow it
-ARC-

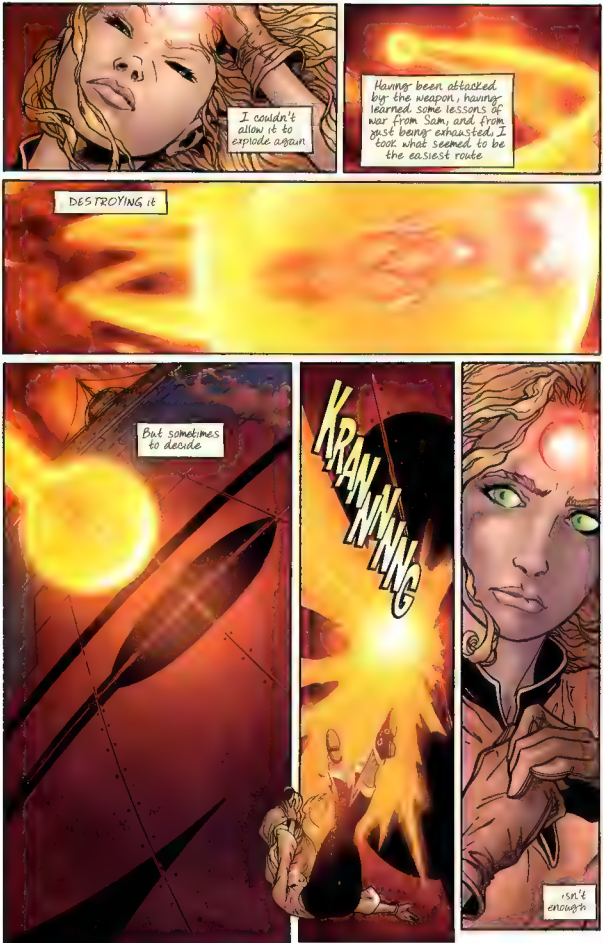
I was shaken by the impact--rid scattered us all--but more shaken when I realized there was no other sign of movement.
We were HERE on this coast because it was the most convenient place for me to tend to the injured Caddonians THEY were hurt because I'd been leading raids against Hahn's forces.
For one terrible long moment I thought I'd killed them all.
JAD!
DEREN?
PLEASE MOVE!
JAD!
DEREN!

JADE
Although, truthfully I worried about ONE more than all others
Given what everyone who had joined me was risking, that wasn't right
SE!
INN
WH
WHA
SEPH!
LET ME FIX YOU BEFORE YOU TRY TO SAY ANY MORE
All around me, their spirits glowed some much more brightly than others, but we'd been spared the massive death I'd seen in Torbel
Still, I had much work to do to heal them all
Amazing how I could touch a wound that would once have meant certain death
and watch it mend itself under my fingers
The power given to me through my sight will never stop surprising me
HEY!
SEPHIE STOP IT!


BUT, DEREN - THERE ARE INJURED! I HAVE TO HELP THEM!
NO
YOU HAVE TO STOP IT
THE WEAPON ITSELF
IN THE TIME IT TAKES YOU TO SAVE ONE...
HOW MANY DIE IF IT STRIKES AGAIN?
DEREN'S RIGHT ACTUALLY
AS IF THAT WAS UNUSUAL
SEPHIE, YOUR FIRST INSTINCT IS ALWAYS TO HELP, BUT HELP US ALL
THERE'LL BE TIME FOR YOU TWO TO CUDDLE LATER
I--I WASN'T
WHY CAN'T I THINK OF THESE THINGS!
A LOT OF PRACTICE
WHEN YOU LIVE WITH TROUBLE, YOU LEARN TO SPOT THE SOURCE PRETTY QUICKLY
RIGHT JAD

RIGHT DENEN
YOU'RE ALWAYS RIGHT
You can tell certain things about a ship through simple observation
How it bears its weight tells the experience of its cargo holders
Its flight pattern shows how experienced its captain is at working the currents of wind
how familiar the crew is with wing rotation
I've had years of experience evaluating ships
but all I could tell about THIS one--
TGH
BWOOM
--armored like an ore pod, maneuvered like a heavy trader, bearing that strange weapon that I would come to know TOO well--

--was that the shipbuilders of Meridian had NEVER built anything like it
UNH!
BWMMF
It bore CADADOR'S mark ILAHN must have been involved in its making
But how did he learn to propel rocks through the sky with such force?
Did HE have his own visitor from another world?


I couldn't allow it to explode again
Having been attacked by the weapon, having learned some lessons of war from Sam, and from just being exhausted, I took what seemed to be the easiest route
DESTROYING it
But sometimes to decide
KRANNNNNG
isn't enough

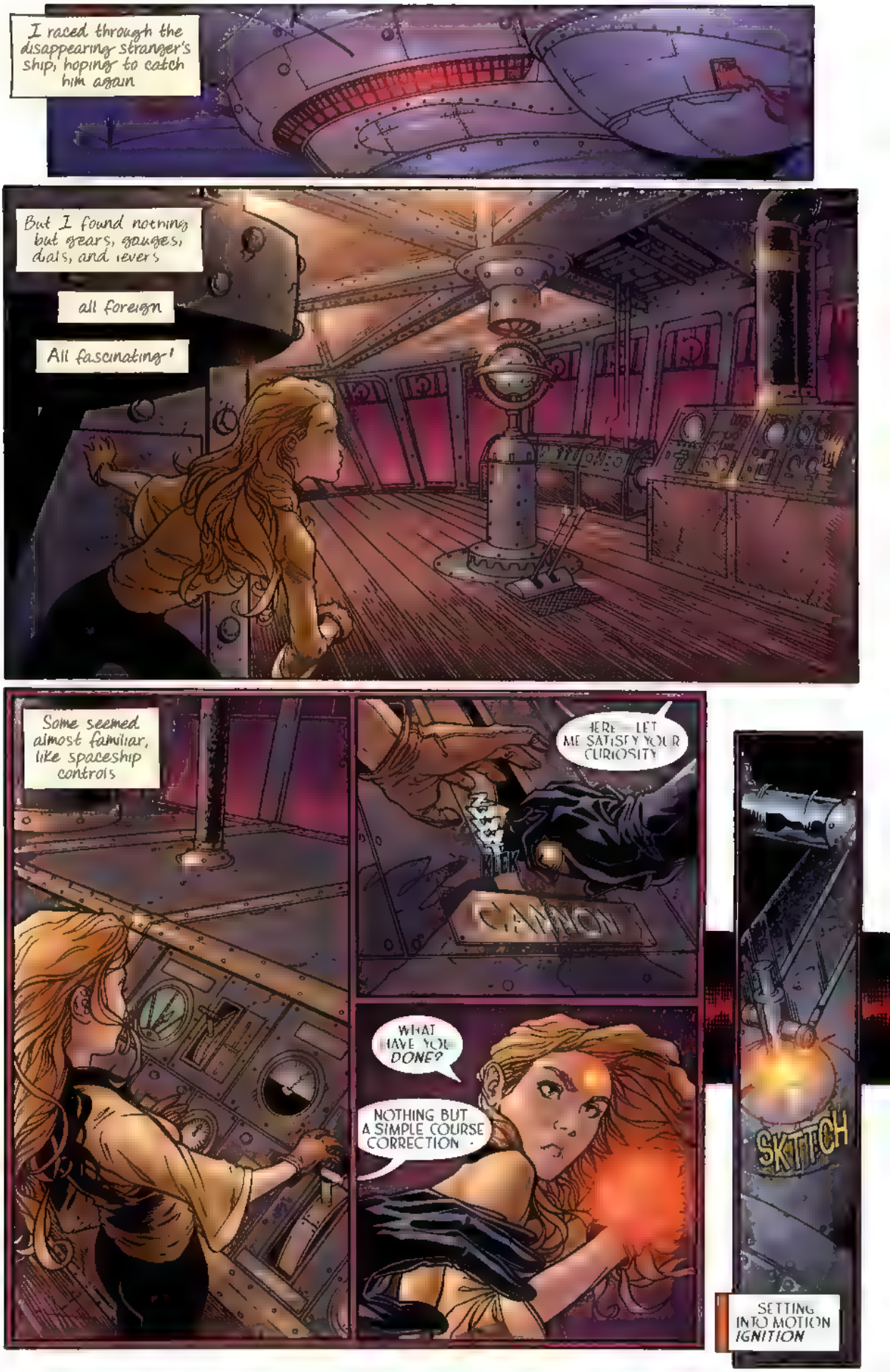
HAV NG A TTLE TROUBLE FIND.NG A WEAK SPOT?
LL SAVE YOU THE EFFORT, MIN.STER OF MERIDIAN THERE ISN T ONE
YOU KNOW ME?
I KNOW OF YOU
I DON T SHARE THAT ADVANTAGE MISTER ?
RHO RHUSTANE, SEPHIE A SIMPLE MERCHANT OF WARES, BE WARE ESPECIALLY
ARE YOU CAPTAIN OF THIS SHIP, RHO RHUSTANE?
DID YOU INVENT THAT TERRIBLE WEAPON?
CAPTAIN CREW AND UHP!
NOT SO CLOSE, SIGIL BEARER
I'd witnessed ANOTHER man appear and disappear the way Rho did
but it was ste disconcerting to watch him VANISH
WHA ?

eaving only the grim contemplation of the monstrous damage he'd caused
WHAT A WASTE OF GOOD LUMBER
I WONDER IF IT'S ALL WORTH
AND THOUGHTS WONDER? YOU THINK WE MADE A MISTAKE LEAVING THE FOREST FOR THE PEACEFUL SEASHORE?
NAH COTSON IT'S JUST BEING OUT IN THE OPENS GOT ME A LITTLE OFF MY FEED
JUST OVERTIRED, THAT'S ALL
ME I'D SAY BEING A LITTLE OFF YOUR MEAD'S THE PROBLEM WITH YOU!
YOU'RE JUST OVERDRIED, THAT'S ALL
I WOULDN'T WANT TO BE THE ONE TO TELL LEMDEN WHAT'S HAPPENED TO HIS DARTER
YOU THINK I WANT THAT TASK? OH NO YOU HAD TO BE THE CAPTAIN
YOU TELL

I'M NOT GOING! NOT WITHOUT JAD!
OH, NO! YOU GO CHASING OFF AFTER HIM AND THE NEXT THING WE KNOW HE'S GOING TO HAVE TO CHASE YOU DOWN!
MIGHT AS WELL TRY TO STOP A WHIRLWIND ZOUKA
YOU'RE STAYING WITH US!
I THOUGHT YOU WERE A TITAN
WHEN WE'RE THROUGH SEPHIE OWES US A DRINK
WHEN WE'RE THROUGH SEPHIE OWES US A BAR!

LEAVE THE WOUNDED -- THEY'RE SAFER HERE!
EVERYONE ABLE, HAUL YOUR HINDS TO THE SUNSHIP!
WE'LL DRAW ITS FIRE AWAY FROM THE SHORE!
I'LL BE BACK! JUST LET ME FIND HIM!
FEABIE!

GOOD PLAN! RIGHT BEHIND YOU!
PULL ME IN!
SEE TO THE INJURED JAD—
WHA—?
OR YOU MIGHT CAUSE MORE
EEYOWTCH!
WHAT DID I EVER DO TO YOU, DEREN?


I raced through the disappearing stranger's ship, hoping to catch him again
But I found nothing but gears, gauges, dials, and levers
all foreign
All fascinating!
Some seemed almost familiar, like spaceship controls
HERE — LET ME SATISFY YOUR CURIOSITY
KLEK
CANNON
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?
NOTHING BUT A SIMPLE COURSE CORRECTION
SKITCH
SETTING INTO MOTION
IGNITION

FOLLOWED BY EXPLOSION, PROPULSION, DESTRUCTION, UNTIL--
--COURSE OF TROUBLEMAKERS CORRECTED
I GATHER YOU'RE UNFAMILIAR WITH THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE CANNON?
WHAT DOES IT MEAN, TO CANNON?
SEEP
My eyes teared, blood pounded through my veins so hard I could barely think!
TELL ME!
BOOM
He was doing this to me! I could FEEL it!
IT'S A NOUN, NOT A VERB
CANNON
THE CANNON
WHAT IT MEANS
IS PAIN
His power went beyond disappearing
He was...insane and he could project the sensation!
AAAH!
THE CANNON! YOU MADE IT EXPLODE!
NOT DIRECTLY. I JUST ADDED THE SPARK

My head wa swirling CRAZY!
I had to stop the projectile
but more than that, I had to ESCAPE!
I HAD
TO STOP IT
BEFORE--
NNNH

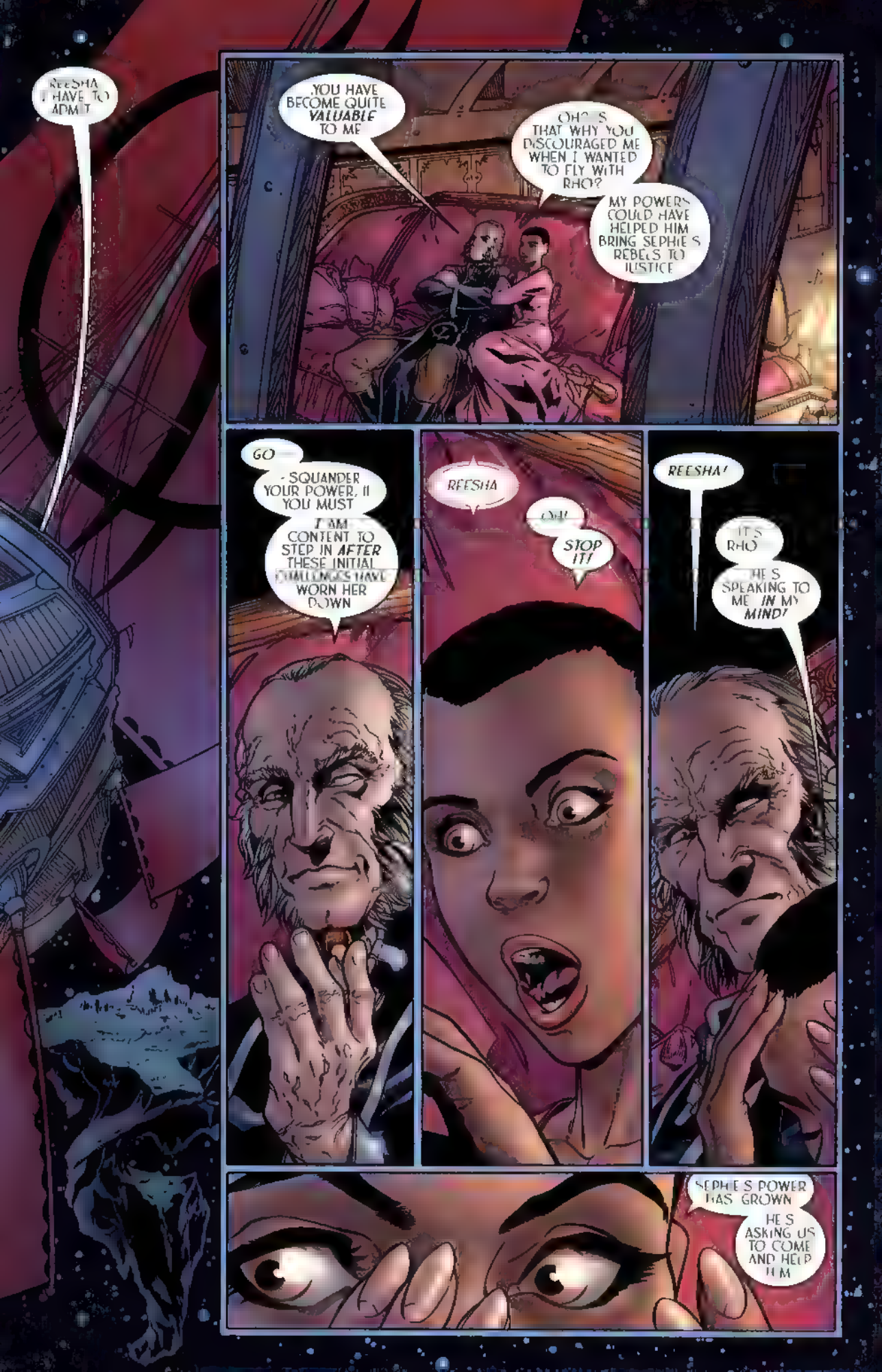
before it hit the ground

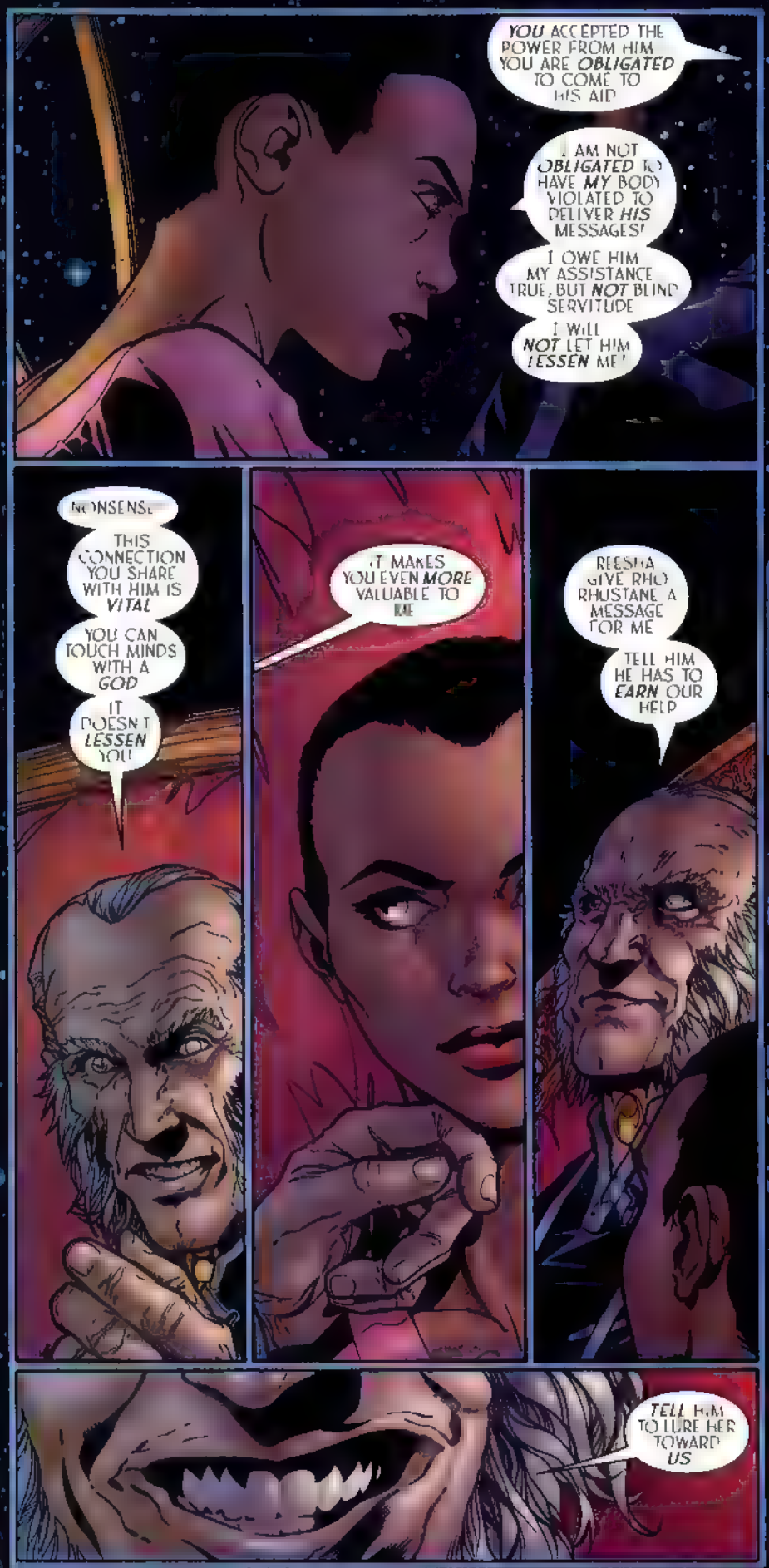
I didn't know just who was on my ship
only that they were in danger
because I hadn't stopped the problem at the SOURCE
the weapon itself
Maybe I couldn't pierce the ship's armor
but it still had SAILS!
Control the sails and a ship is powerless

But I had lost interest in control.
I just wanted it all GONE!
Arro had REALLY gotten to me I'd glimpsed now he felt about us-- just toys for him to play with in some game involving a red witch -
I'd show him who's a TOY!
HANG ON, DEREN--I'M HERE!

THEN GET UP THERE THE PROBLEMS WORST TOPSIDE!
BUT THE SHIP--?
SN'T AS DAMAGED AS HER CREW!
WATCH YOUR EARS, SEPH -- THAT BUNCH IS MAKING ME LOOK PRETTY
HEY, NOW WATCH MY EARS!
IF YOU HADN'T SENT US BROADSIDES
WE'RE GOING TO DIE UP HERE!
MOMMA
I SAID TO CUT THE SAILS!

WHERE'S JAD?
I DON'T SEE HIM!
WHERE'S JAD?!
SEPHIE!
STOP SCREAMING!
HE'S ON THE GROUND I--WE LEFT THE INJURED THERE!
HE'S FINE!
I'M FINE
THIS ISN'T REAL!
IT'S RHO! HE'S AFFECTING ALL OF US!
CALM DOWN, EVERYONE!
THIS ISN'T US! IT'S RHO!
THANKS, FOR THE FIX, SEPH--BUT RHO WHO?
ANOTHER ONE LIKE ILAHN AND ME
THE SHIP WITH THE CANNON--THE WEAPON THAT PROPELS ROCKS--THAT'S HIS.
HE PROJECTS EMOTION! CRAZY THOUGHTS!
I'VE GOT TO STOP HIM AND I CAN'T IF YOU'RE ALL HERE!
YOU HAVE TO STAY OUT OF MY WAY!
YOU HEAR ME? GO AWAY!


REESHA, I HAVE TO ADMIT
YOU HAVE BECOME QUITE VALUABLE TO ME
OH... S THAT WHY YOU DISCOURAGED ME WHEN I WANTED TO FLY WITH RHO?
MY POWERS COULD HAVE HELPED HIM BRING SEPHIE S REBELS TO JUSTICE
GO
- SQUANDER YOUR POWER, IF YOU MUST
I AM CONTENT TO STEP IN AFTER THESE INITIAL CHALLENGES HAVE WORN HER DOWN
REESHA
OH!
STOP IT!
REESHA!
IT'S RHO
HE'S SPEAKING TO ME IN MY MIND!
SEPHIE'S POWER HAS GROWN
HE'S ASKING US TO COME AND HELP HIM


YOU ACCEPTED THE POWER FROM HIM YOU ARE OBLIGATED TO COME TO HIS AID
I AM NOT OBLIGATED TO HAVE MY BODY VIOLATED TO DELIVER HIS MESSAGES!
I OWE HIM MY ASSISTANCE TRUE, BUT NOT BLIND SERVITUDE
I WILL NOT LET HIM LESSEN ME!
NONSENSE
THIS CONNECTION YOU SHARE WITH HIM IS VITAL
YOU CAN TOUCH MINDS WITH A GOD
IT DOESN'T LESSEN YOU!
IT MAKES YOU EVEN MORE VALUABLE TO
REESHA GIVE RHO RHUSTANE A MESSAGE FOR ME
TELL HIM HE HAS TO EARN OUR HELP
TELL HIM TO LURE HER TOWARD US

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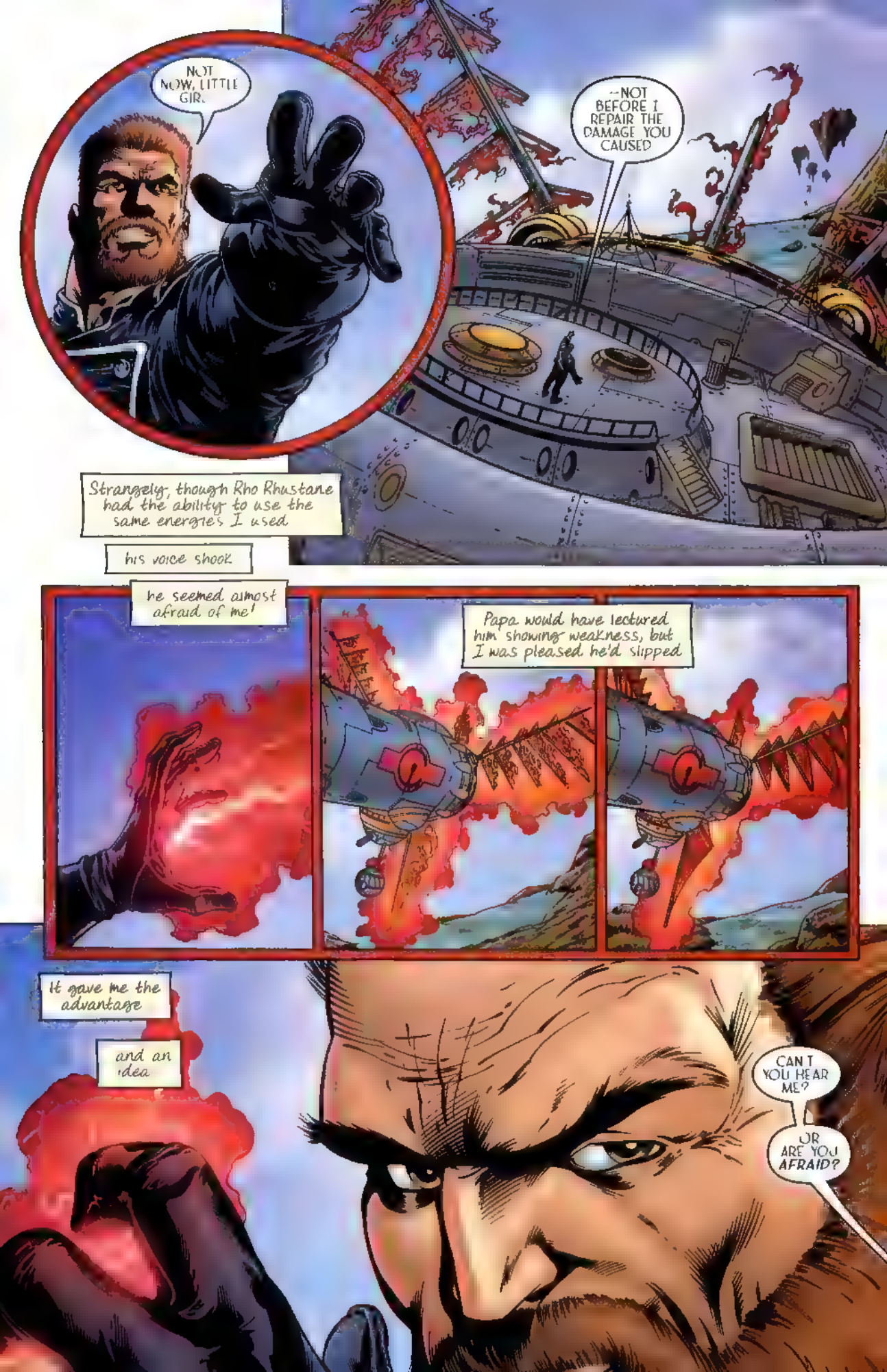
Sephie's pirates, aided by new inventions from Massintak, have been successfully harassing the ships on Cadador's trade route to prove Ilahn can be stopped. A messenger from the ironworking island of Torbel causes the pirates to abandon their blockade and rush to help, but they arrive too late to save the island. They can only help with the evacuation until Torbel falls into the sea below with great loss of life.

Ambushed by the Cadadorian armada, Sephie is surprised by a visit from another Sigil-Bearer, Samandahl Rey. Empathically connecting with him, she gains Sam's memories and knowledge before he disappears again. The next attack comes in the form of a weapon previously unknown on Demetria: a cannon suspended from an airship piloted by **Rho Rhustane**.

Ilahn, on his way to Meridian with **Reesha**, waits to see who will be the victor: Sephie or Rho.

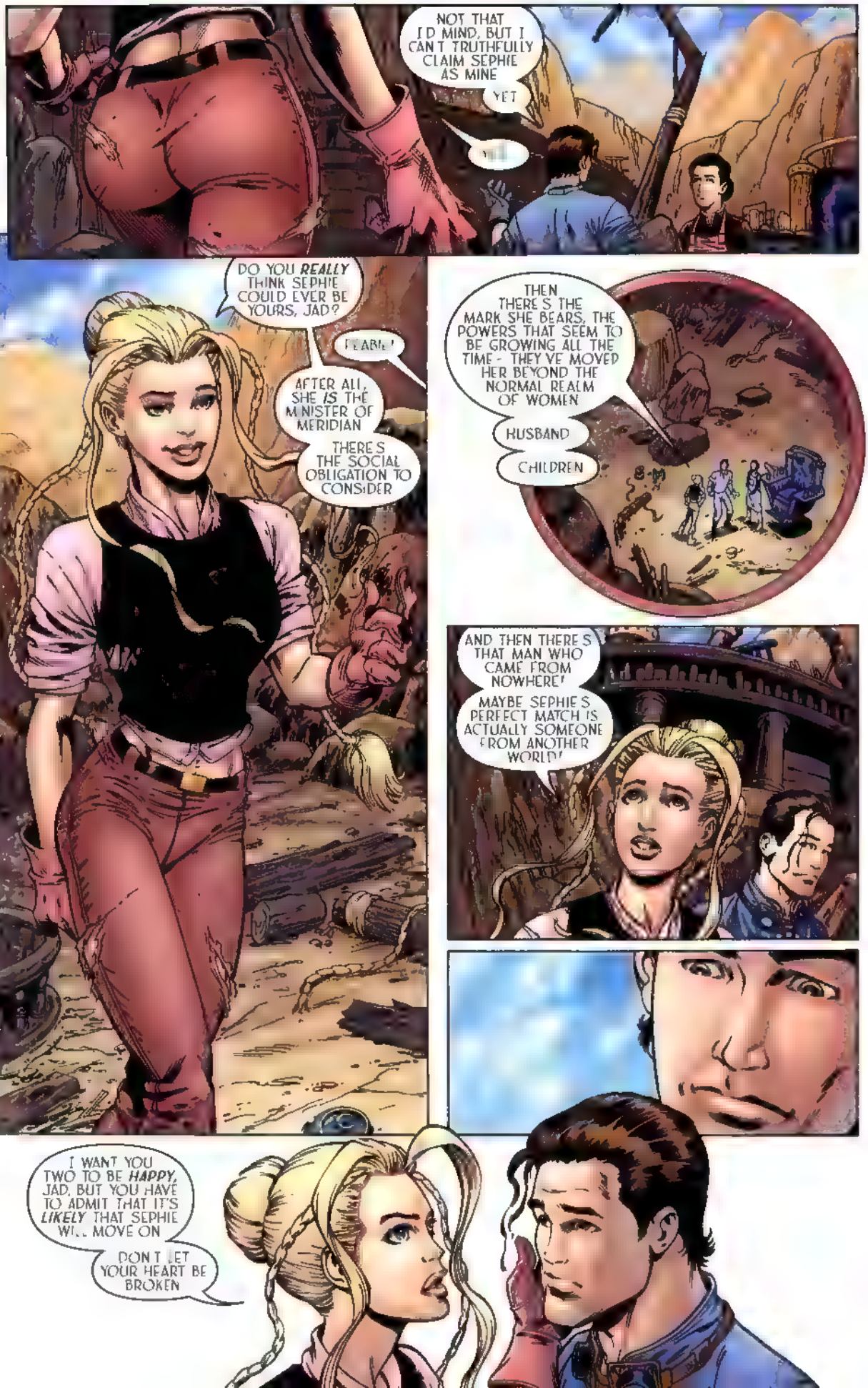
COME FACE ME, RHO RHUSTANE!
Responsibility can be a terrible burden
Exhausted from two days without sleep
frightened that my crew hadn't moved our sunship far enough away to be safe
shocked that I could even contemplate such an act
I was intent on killing
My quarry was a merchant named RHO RHUSTANE, who had introduced the cannon to our skies
A weapon utilizing explosions to violently propel rocks
We'd never known its like
RHO!
And I faced him alone
because there was no one with whom I could share that responsibility


NOT NOW, LITTLE GIRL
--NOT BEFORE I REPAIR THE DAMAGE YOU CAUSED
Strangely, though Rho Rhustane had the ability to use the same energies I used
his voice shook
he seemed almost afraid of me!
Papa would have lectured him showing weakness, but I was pleased he'd slipped
It gave me the advantage
and an idea
CAN'T YOU HEAR ME?
OR ARE YOU AFRAID?

AFRAID?
GAZE UPON MY TRUE VISAGE, CHILD--
DO I LOOK
--AFRAID?
I was startled, but not because of his transformation
Just as before, an overwhelming chaos flooded through me
My heart pounded wildly and the sound filled my ears
I was panicky
Fearful
Helpless!

I mistakenly believed I had the advantage
but Rho was no longer like me. He was now something from the pre-Cataclysm legends!
I tried to summon the lessons I'd learned from Sam
but thinking itself was too difficult
My thoughts scattered like startled birds
leaving only empty fear
Pure terror
Magnified because I realized it was all up to ME
If Rho killed me here surely he'd go after my crew next
I had to make sure that didn't happen
There had to be a way around the pulsing fear
I just had to THINK!
Think like SAM

or other would suffer
THEY'RE JUST HOVERING?
OUR SHIP COULD FLY RINGS AROUND THAT LUMBERING HULK - THEY SHOULD BE HOUNDING T!
THEY SHOULD BE COMING BACK FOR ME
I COULD SHOW THEM HOW TO
YOU WEREN'T MEANT TO, TAKARTY
IT WASN'T YOUR BATTLE
WASN'T MEANT -!
OF COURSE IT'S MY BATTLE!
THOSE ARE SKYSHIPS!
I'M FROM MERIDIAN!
UH HEY
AREN'T YOU--?
DON'T YOU NEED ?
THE HOVERCHAIR?
IT'S NEEDED YES, BUT IT'S NOT ME WHO NEEDS IT
YEARS AGO, WE'D BEEN HAVING DIFFICULTY WITH NAUK
FATE, IN HER CRUEL IRONY, HAD PLACED UPON THE ISLAND OF THINKERS A MAN DEFICIENT IN THOSE GIFTS
HE WAS LOVED BUT LACKED PURPOSE WHEN I HURT MY LEG, IT GAVE HIM GREAT JOY TO BE MY SOURCE OF MOBILITY
HE HAD FINALLY FOUND HIS PURPOSE -- HE WASN'T POOR NAUK ANYMORE IF THE PRICE OF HIS NEWLY-FOUND PRIDE MEANS MY BACK GETS STIFF FROM SITTING, SO BE IT
MY LEG WON'T 'HEAL' UNTIL THE NEXT CLUMSY PERSON BREAKS ONE AND YOUR SEPHIE ISN'T AROUND TO FIX IT!
I'VE HAD TO REFUSE HER KIND ADVANCES THREE TIMES NOW!
SHE'S NOT MY SEPHIE

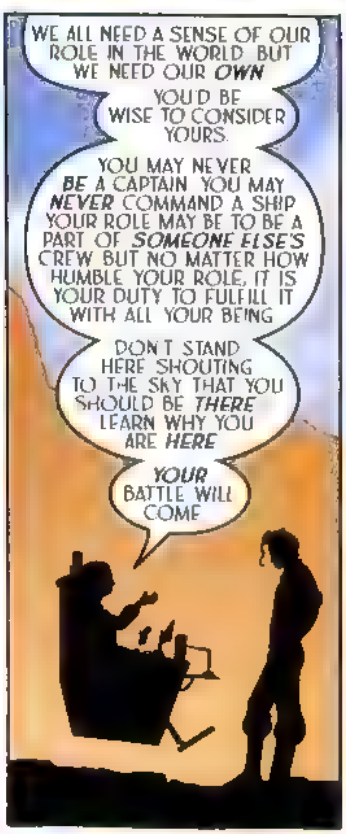

NOT THAT I'D MIND, BUT I CAN'T TRUTHFULLY CLAIM SEPHIE AS MINE
YET
DO YOU *REALLY* THINK SEPHIE COULD EVER BE YOURS, JAD?
PLEASE!
AFTER ALL, SHE *IS* THE MINISTER OF MERIDIAN
THERE'S THE SOCIAL OBLIGATION TO CONSIDER
THEN THERE'S THE MARK SHE BEARS, THE POWERS THAT SEEM TO BE GROWING ALL THE TIME - THEY'VE MOVED HER BEYOND THE NORMAL REALM OF WOMEN
HUSBAND
CHILDREN
AND THEN THERE'S THAT MAN WHO CAME FROM NOWHERE!
MAYBE SEPHIE'S PERFECT MATCH IS ACTUALLY SOMEONE FROM ANOTHER WORLD!
I WANT YOU TWO TO BE *HAPPY*, JAD, BUT YOU HAVE TO ADMIT THAT IT'S *LIKELY* THAT SEPHIE WILL MOVE ON
DON'T LET YOUR HEART BE BROKEN

DO YOU REALLY THINK SEPHIE WILL *LEAVE* MERIDIAN ONCE WE'RE DONE?
SHE MIGHT
THINK ABOUT WHO'S REALLY GOOD FOR YOU, JAD
OH, FEABIE
I LOVE THE WAY YOU'RE LOOKING OUT FOR ME
YES?
BUT YOU BETTER THAN ANYONE ELSE
ME?
YOU
YOU SHOULD *KNOW* THAT SEPHIE AND I ARE DESTINED TO BE TOGETHER!
YOU!
UH
YOU!
AND SEPHIE
OF *COURSE*

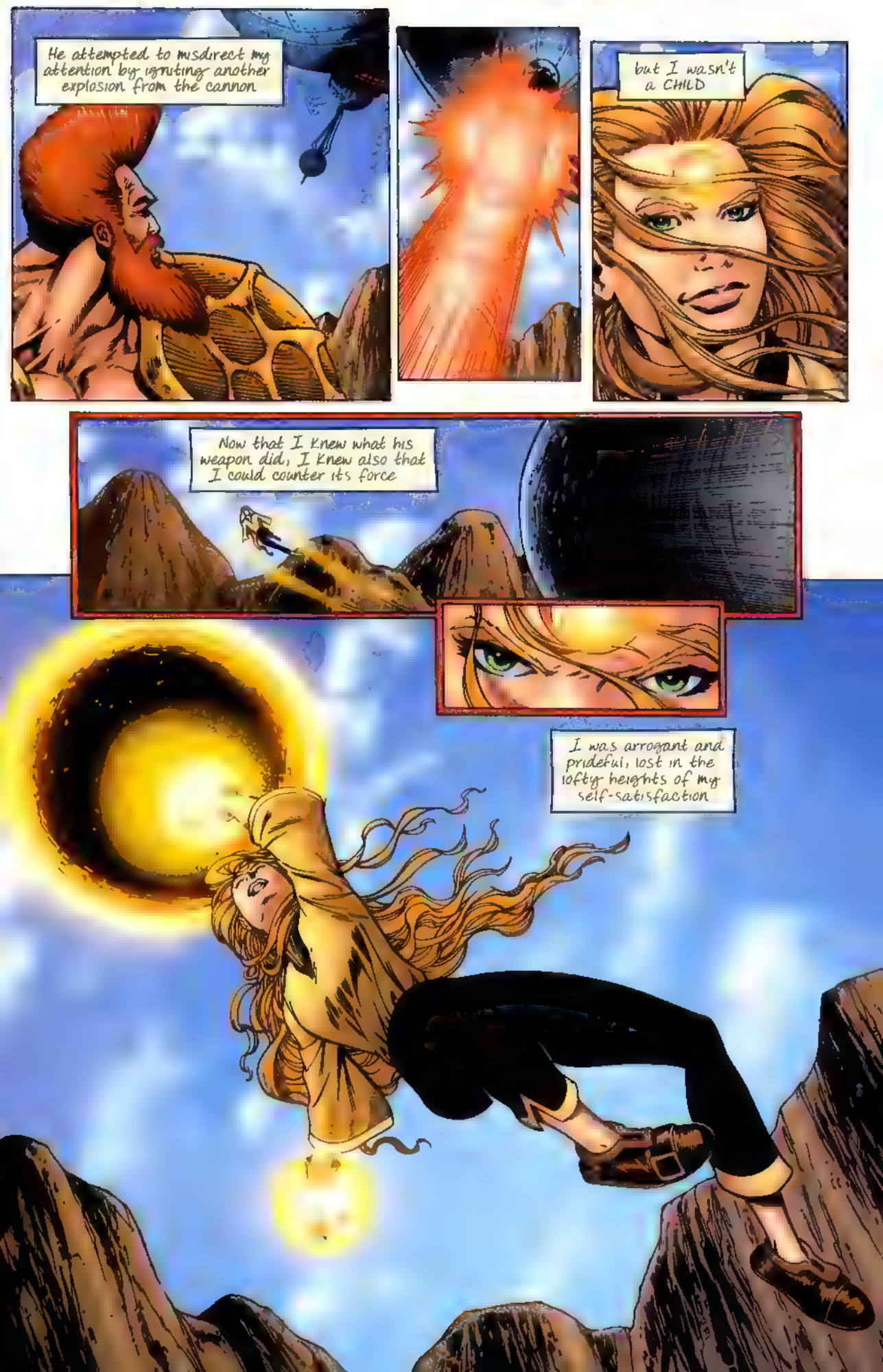
FEABIE?
WHAT'S WRONG? WHAT'D I SAY?
LEAVE HER BE TAKARTY
WOUNDS TO THE HEART CAN'T BE SALVED WITH WORDS
THERE IS NO REWARD RICH ENOUGH TO ENTICE ME TO BE YOUR AGE AGAIN

YOU CAN'T ASK FEABIE TO APPRECIATE THAT HER FRIEND HAS WHAT SHE HERSELF WANTS
FEABIE--?
SHE WANTS--? BUT FEABIE'S LIKE MY LITTLE SISTER
HOW COULD SHE NOT KNOW HOW I FEEL ABOUT SEPHIE?
HMM. I SEE NAUK'S RETURNING. WILL YOU HELP ME INTO MY CHAIR?

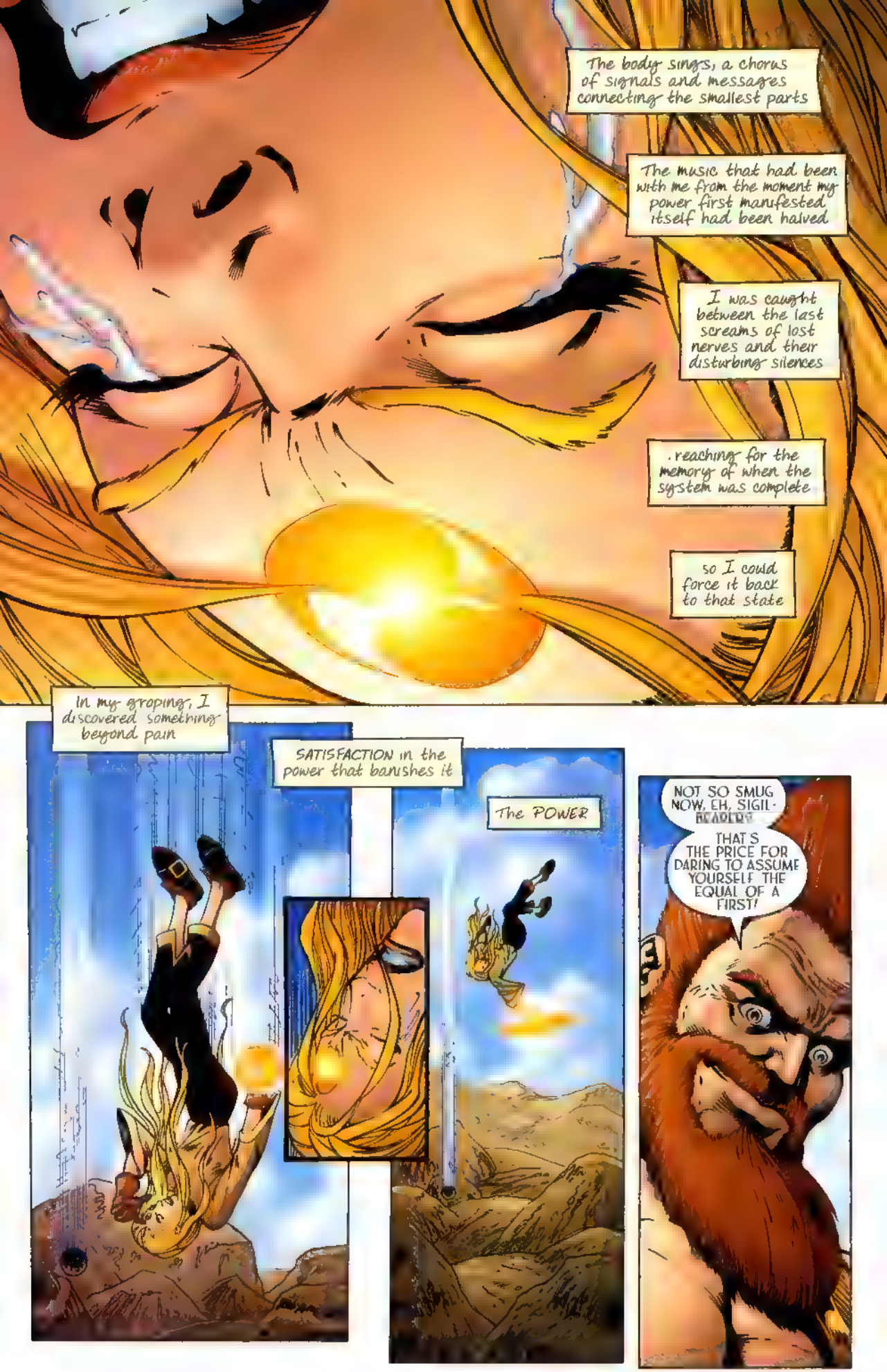
TAKARTY, THE GIRL ONLY KNOWS YOU FEEL SO STRONGLY THAT YOUR WISHES MUST MATCH HER OWN
BE CAREFUL, SON
YOU'RE AT THE AGE WHEN THE SOUL LEARNS ITS PURPOSE
GIRLS ALL TOO OFTEN SEEK THEIRS IN BOYS AND ARE SO EASILY HURT BY THEM


WE ALL NEED A SENSE OF OUR ROLE IN THE WORLD. BUT WE NEED OUR OWN
YOU'D BE WISE TO CONSIDER YOURS.
YOU MAY NEVER BE A CAPTAIN. YOU MAY NEVER COMMAND A SHIP. YOUR ROLE MAY BE TO BE A PART OF SOMEONE ELSE'S CREW. BUT NO MATTER HOW HUMBLE YOUR ROLE, IT IS YOUR DUTY TO FULFILL IT WITH ALL YOUR BEING.
DON'T STAND HERE SHOUTING TO THE SKY THAT YOU SHOULD BE THERE. LEARN WHY YOU ARE HERE
YOUR BATTLE WILL COME

THIS ONE BELONGS TO SLPHIE
Given the choice, I'd much rather negotiate than strike out with my hands.
That comes from being raised by loving people in a gentle land.
But my adversary that day did not come from Meridian
forcing me to adapt
KRAK!
So I called on tactics learned by my fellow Sigil-Bearer
and pretended we were two starships dueling in the void between worlds
Mating it a game allowed me to step outside the madness he spawned in me and dispassionately analyze his actions
To NOTICE that he avoided being touched by me
My thumping heart leaped with a wild pride at my boldness

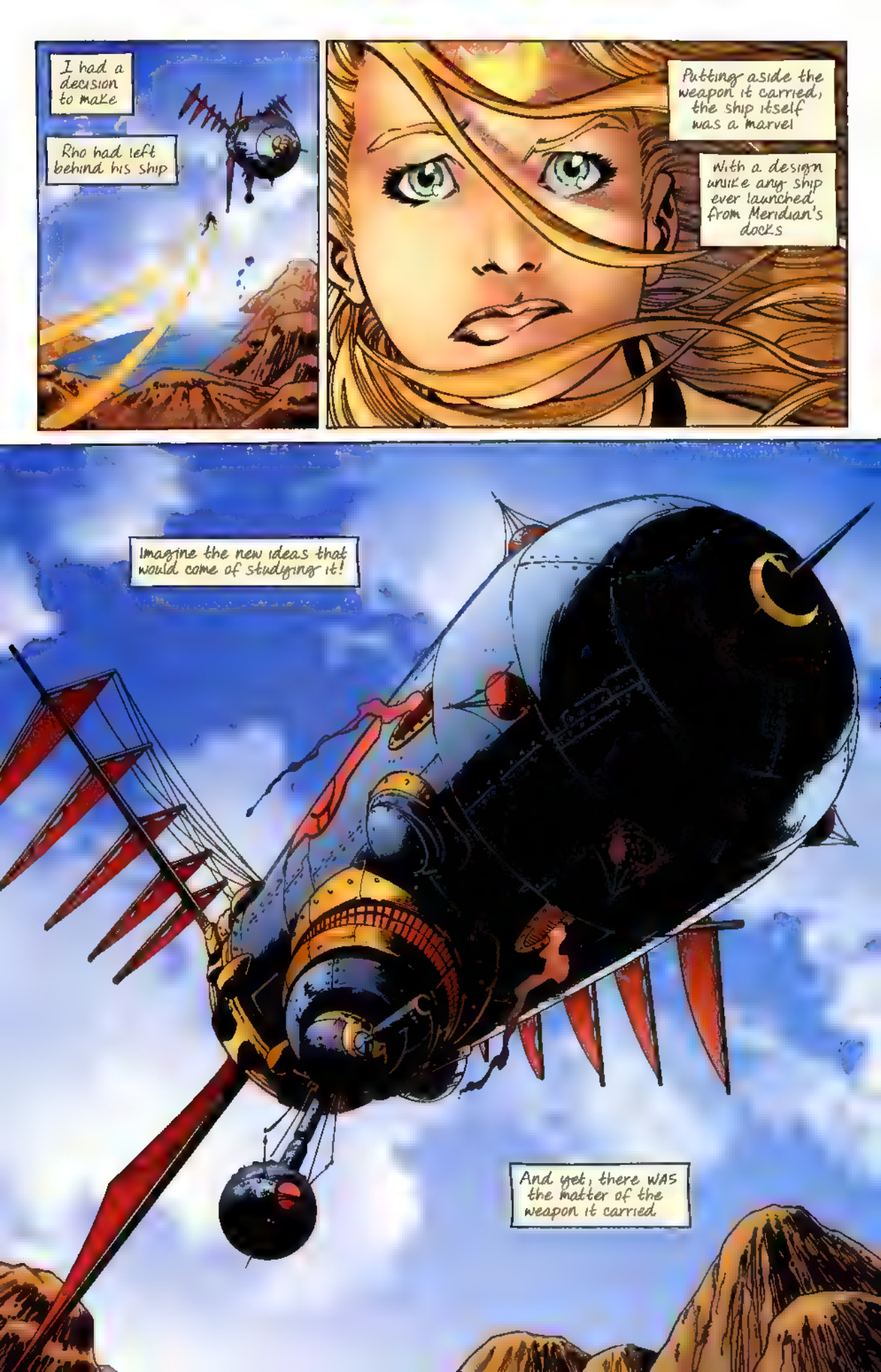

He attempted to misdirect my attention by igniting another explosion from the cannon
but I wasn't a CHILD
Now that I knew what his weapon did, I knew also that I could counter its force
I was arrogant and prideful, lost in the lofty heights of my self-satisfaction

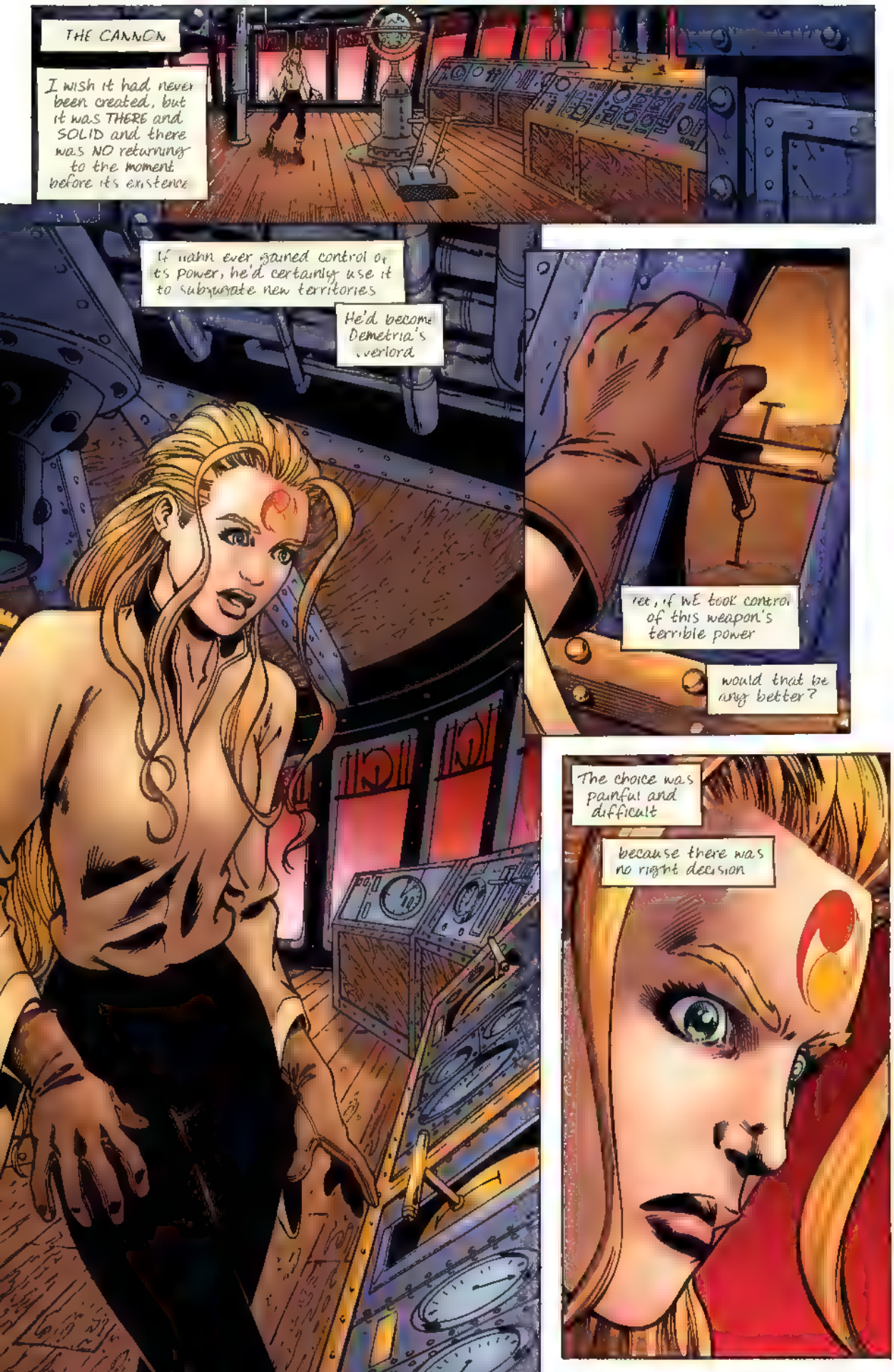
until his true attack
Pain thrust any pride from my mind
KR
SPLKGRCH
replacing it with a numb horror as the realization struck
I could no longer feel my legs
He had broken my back


The body sings, a chorus of signals and messages connecting the smallest parts
The music that had been with me from the moment my power first manifested itself had been halved
I was caught between the last screams of lost nerves and their disturbing silences
. reaching for the memory of when the system was complete
so I could force it back to that state
In my groping, I discovered something beyond pain
SATISFACTION in the power that banishes it
The POWER
NOT SO SMUG NOW, EH, SIGIL - READLOW
THAT'S THE PRICE FOR DARING TO ASSUME YOURSELF THE EQUAL OF A FIRST!

REESHA!
INFORM THE MINISTER OF CADADOR THAT MERIDIAN IS NOW HIS AS WELL!
NNNH
NO!
The First
RHO RHUSTANE - I KNOW YOUR REAL NAME! TRENIN!
I KNOW HOW YOU CAN BE DEFEATED!
Sam encountered a man who described himself as a First
Sam had been able to leech energy from him
I suspected that I might be able to do the same

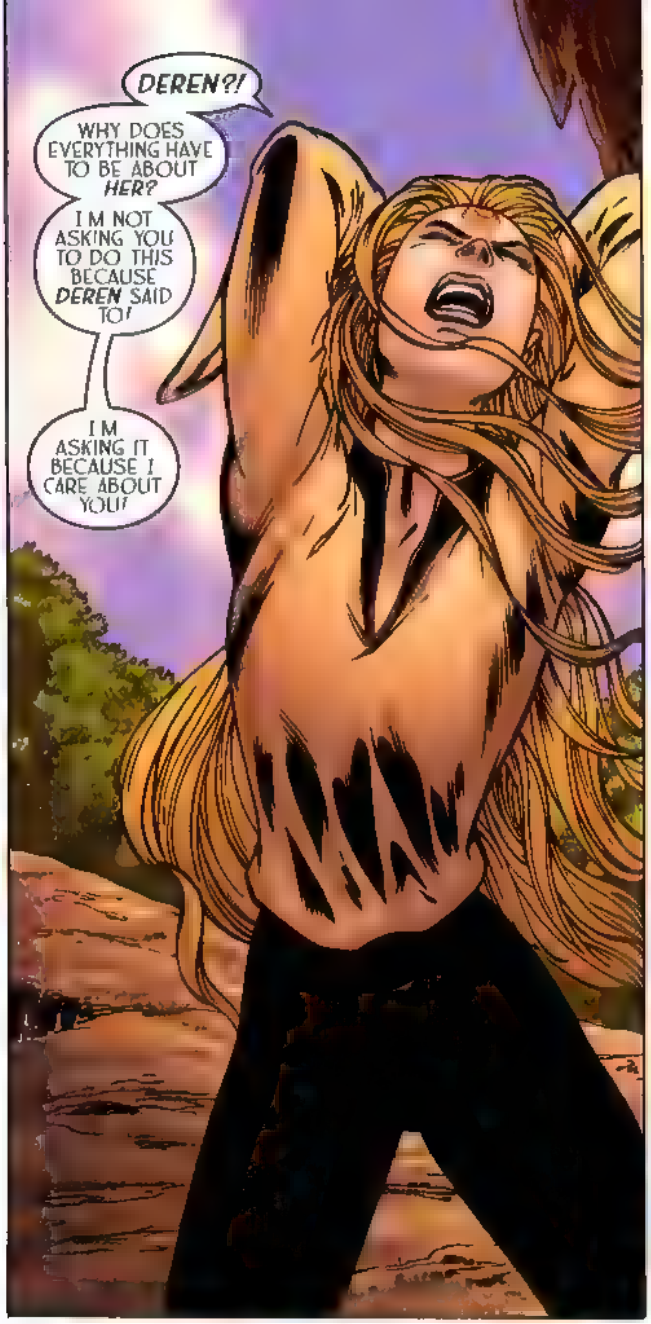
As I said, I wanted to kill this man
YOU KNOW ME AS TRENIN?
From the looks of him, I was succeeding
YES I KNOW ALL ABOUT YOU!
HOW YOU AND YALA PLAYED WITH SAMANDAH, REY, GIVING HIM YOUR SHIP AND GIVING POWER TO THE SAURIAN!
YOU COULDN'T DEFEAT SAM AND YOU WON'T SEND ME TO OTHER WORLDS!
YOU'RE CONFUSING ME WITH ANOTHER BUT MY LADY INGRA MAY BE INTERESTED TO KNOW THAT TRENIN'S BEEN MEDDLING WITH ONE OF YOUR KIND
SHE MAY EVEN BE INTERESTED ENOUGH TO WELCOME ME HOME TO ELYSIA
FAREWELL, LITTLE SEPHIE
MAY WE NEVER MEET AGAIN
Rho's twisted senses kept me from getting a clear sense of his motives or his past, but the image of this Ingra, presumably the Minister of his city, was overpoweringly strong
But why did I seem to see her speaking to my Uncle Ilahn?
It was all too twisted to make sense of
When he left, the frenzy went with him
I could THINK

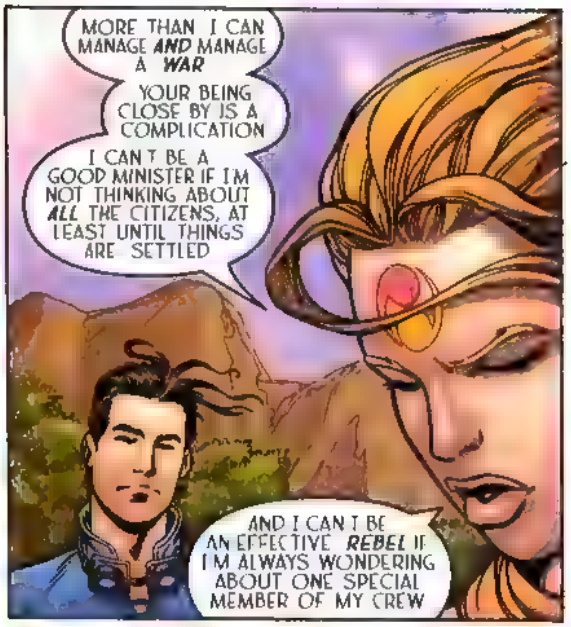

I had a decision to make
Rho had left behind his ship
Putting aside the weapon it carried, the ship itself was a marvel
With a design unlike any ship ever launched from Meridian's docks
Imagine the new ideas that would come of studying it!
And yet, there WAS the matter of the weapon it carried.


THE CANNON
I wish it had never been created, but it was THERE and SOLID and there was NO returning to the moment before its existence
If Hahn ever gained control of it's power, he'd certainly use it to subjugate new territories
He'd become Demetria's overlord
Yet, if WE took control of this weapon's terrible power
would that be any better?
The choice was painful and difficult
because there was no right decision

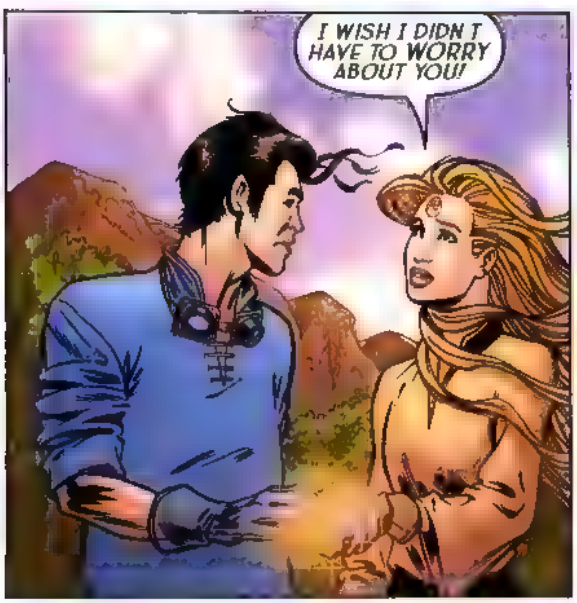
In the end...
as always
I chose not to destroy
Gathering what was left of our fleet, I returned to Massintax
hoping to enjoy a time of rest
PROUD?
NO. NOT REALLY
I'M JUST RELIEVED RHO RHUSTANE HASN'T REAPPEARED TO CLAIM HIS SHIP

WELL I'M PROUD OF YOU
A LITTLE AMAZED, ACTUALLY AT ALL THAT YOU CAN DO
SEPHIE, LISTEN TO ME
YOU SHOULDN'T BE DISAPPOINTED
YOU SHOULD BE HAPPY
YOU'VE SURVIVED SO MUCH AND THERE'S FINALLY A LITTLE TIME FOR US TO BE TOGETHER
ALONE
JAD, I'VE BEEN THINKING THE SAME THING
AND I HAVE TO ASK YOU SOMETHING IMPORTANT
YES?
JAD, WILL YOU GO HOME?
I CAN'T HAVE YOU HERE WITH ME UNTIL AFTER ILAHN'S BEEN REMOVED FROM POWER
YOU, YOU'RE
YOU'RE IN THE WAY
WHAT?!
SEPHIE--!
DO YOU HAVE TO DO EVERYTHING DEREN SAYS?


DEREN?!
WHY DOES EVERYTHING HAVE TO BE ABOUT HER?
I'M NOT ASKING YOU TO DO THIS BECAUSE DEREN SAID TO!
I'M ASKING IT BECAUSE I CARE ABOUT YOU!

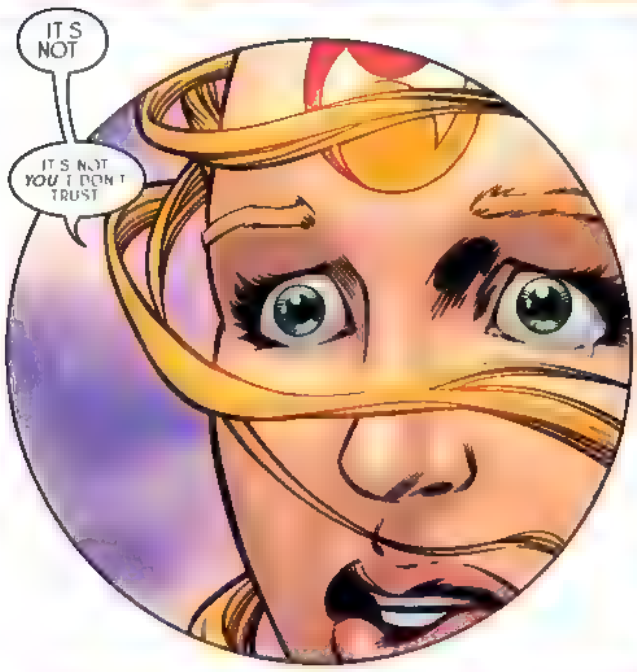

MORE THAN I CAN MANAGE AND MANAGE A WAR
YOUR BEING CLOSE BY IS A COMPLICATION
I CAN'T BE A GOOD MINISTER IF I'M NOT THINKING ABOUT ALL THE CITIZENS, AT LEAST UNTIL THINGS ARE SETTLED
AND I CAN'T BE AN EFFECTIVE REBEL IF I'M ALWAYS WONDERING ABOUT ONE SPECIAL MEMBER OF MY CREW

SEPHIE
YOU NEVER HAVE TO WONDER ABOUT ME
THERE'S NO ONE ELSE
NO!


I WISH I DIDN'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT YOU!

OH
WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER A LONG TIME, SEPHIE
WHEN DID YOU STOP TRUSTING ME?

I'LL GO CHECK ON THE CONDITION OF OUR SHIPS
I DON'T WANT TO BE IN YOUR WAY
JAD?
JAD!
PLEASE TRY TO UNDERSTAND!
IT'S NOT A MATTER OF TRUST


IT'S NOT
IT'S NOT YOU I DON'T TRUST

Responsibility can be a terrible burden

so can love

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Barbara Kesel
Steve McNiven
Tom Simmons
Morry Hollowell

Far away... on the world of Demetria, explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

One of these islands is **Meridian**, home of shipbuilders and **Sephie**, the daughter of Minister Turos. Sephie's life has been spent being groomed to someday take over the ruling of Meridian. Her uncle **Ilahn** is the Minister of the rich city-state of Cadador, which controls most of the shipping and trade on Demetria.

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Ambushed by the Cadadorian armada, Sephie is surprised by a visit from another Sigil-Bearer, Samandahl Rey. Empathically connecting with him, she gains Sam's memories and knowledge before he disappears again. The next attack comes in the form of a weapon previously unknown on Demetria: a cannon, suspended from an airship piloted by the godlike **Rho Rhustane**. Sephie battles both, and Rho disappears, leaving her with his airship. Finally able to be alone with Jad, Sephie finds herself asking him to leave her. They part awkwardly.

Meanwhile, Ilahn has gone to Meridian with **Reesha** to await Sephie's arrival.

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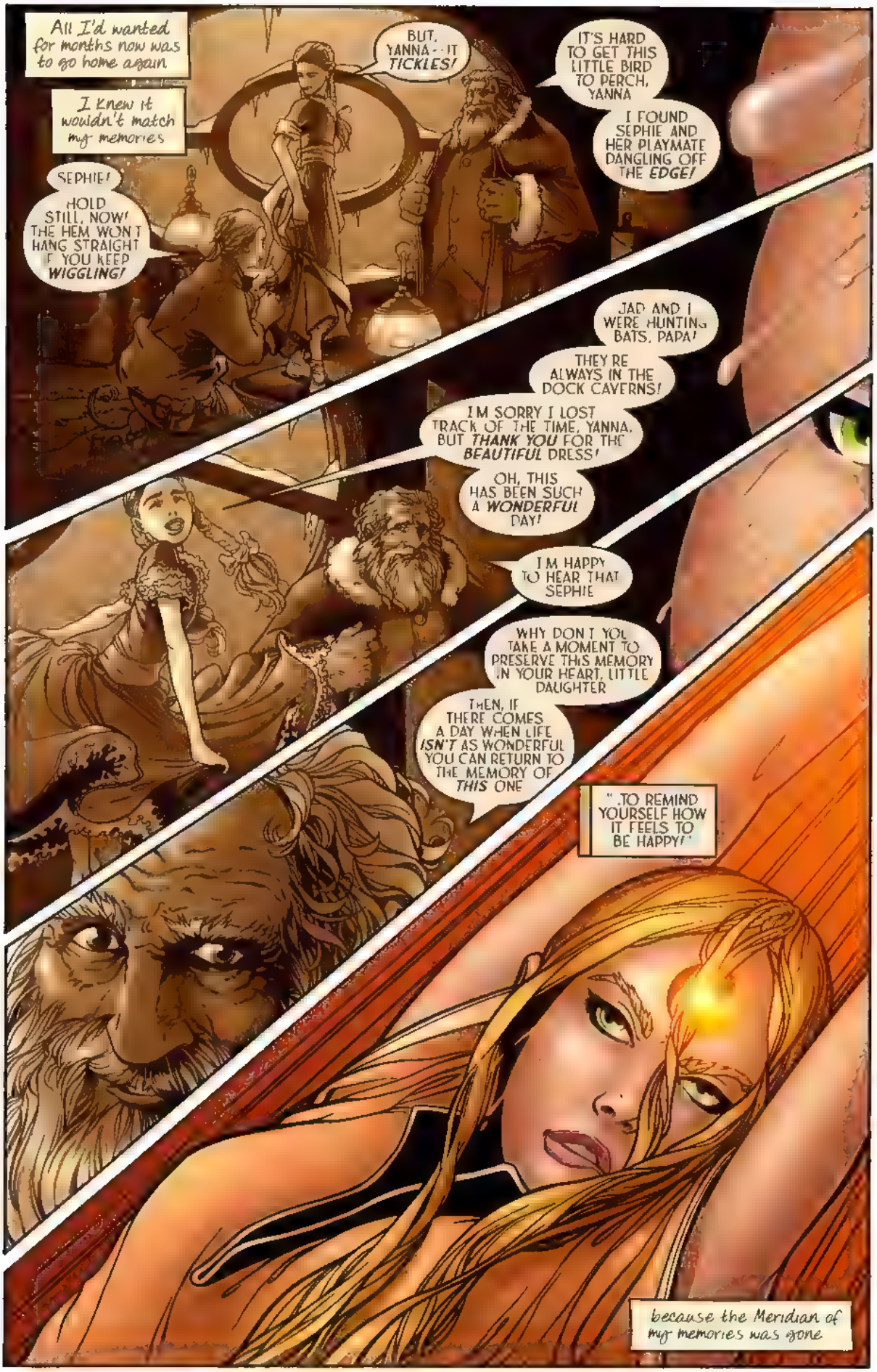
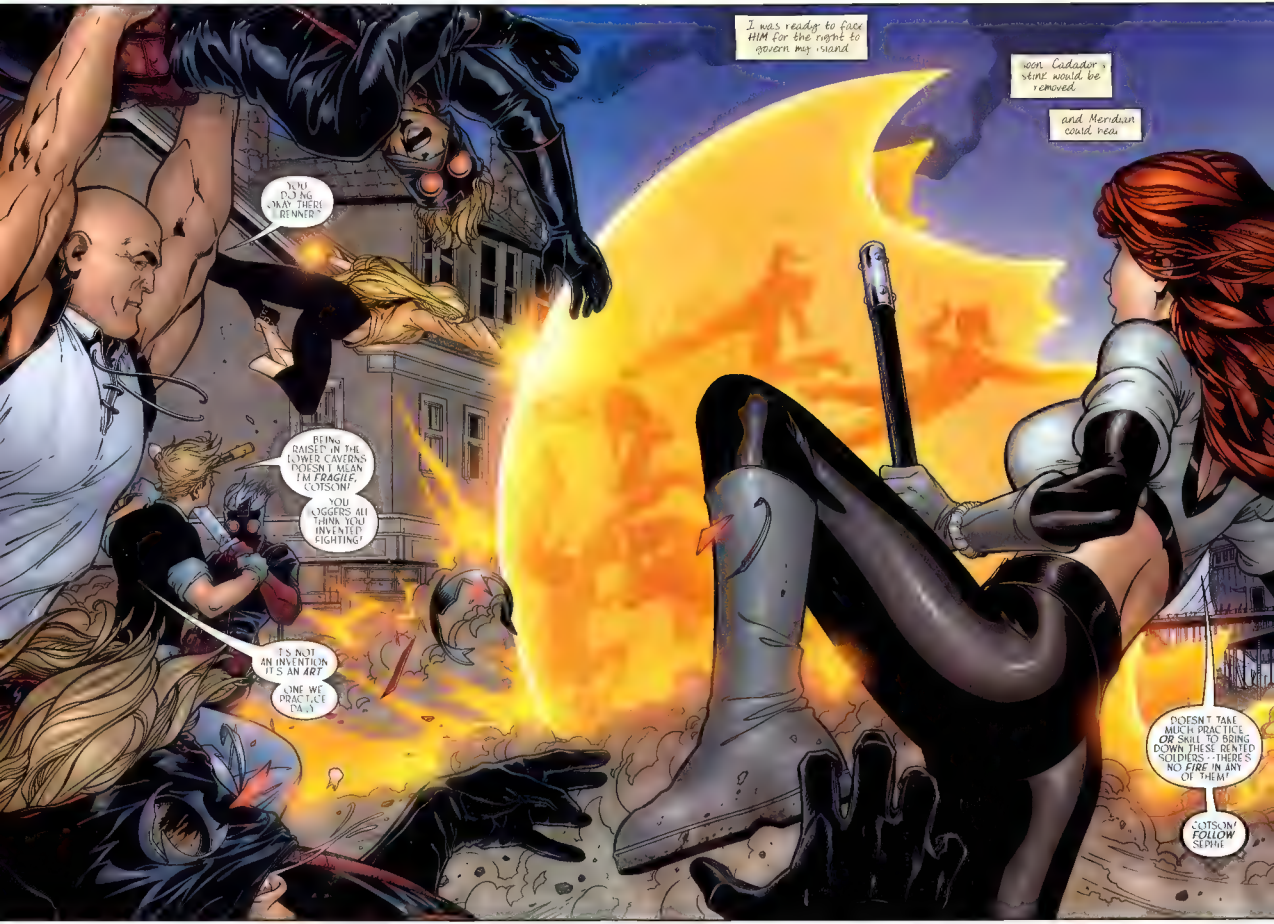
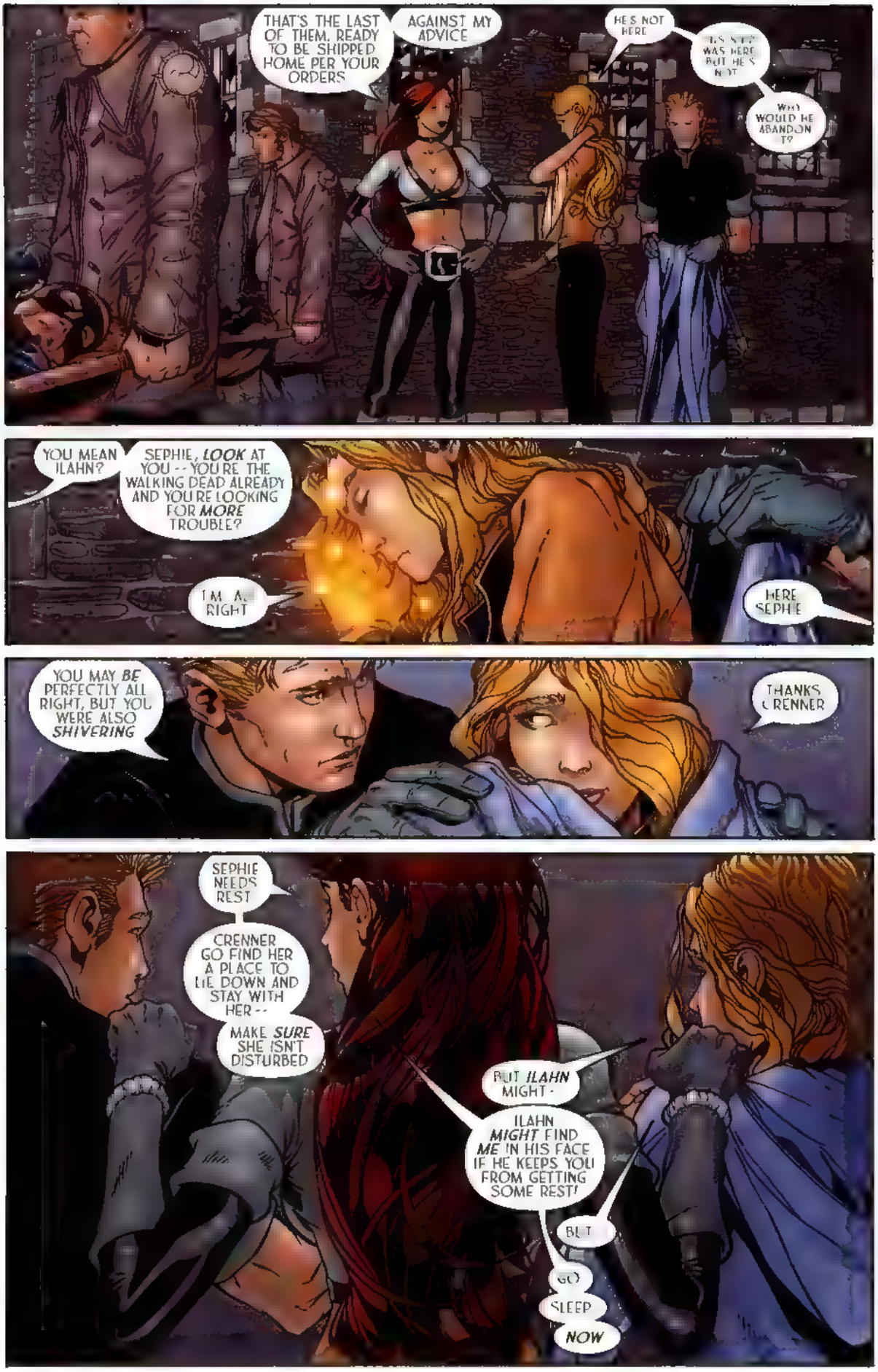

All I'd wanted for months now was to go home again
I knew it wouldn't match my memories
SEPHIE!
HOLD STILL, NOW! THE HEM WON'T HANG STRAIGHT IF YOU KEEP *WIGGLING!*
BUT, YANNA--IT *TICKLES!*
IT'S HARD TO GET THIS LITTLE BIRD TO PERCH, YANNA
I FOUND SEPHIE AND HER PLAYMATE DANGLING OFF THE *EDGE!*
JAD AND I WERE HUNTING BATS, PAPA!
THEY'RE ALWAYS IN THE DOCK CAVERNS!
I'M SORRY I LOST TRACK OF THE TIME, YANNA, BUT *THANK YOU* FOR THE *BEAUTIFUL* DRESS!
OH, THIS HAS BEEN SUCH A *WONDERFUL* DAY!
I'M HAPPY TO HEAR THAT SEPHIE
WHY DON'T YOU TAKE A MOMENT TO PRESERVE THIS MEMORY IN YOUR HEART, LITTLE DAUGHTER
THEN, IF THERE COMES A DAY WHEN LIFE *ISN'T* AS WONDERFUL YOU CAN RETURN TO THE MEMORY OF *THIS* ONE
"...TO REMIND YOURSELF HOW IT FEELS TO BE HAPPY!"
because the Meridian of my memories was gone

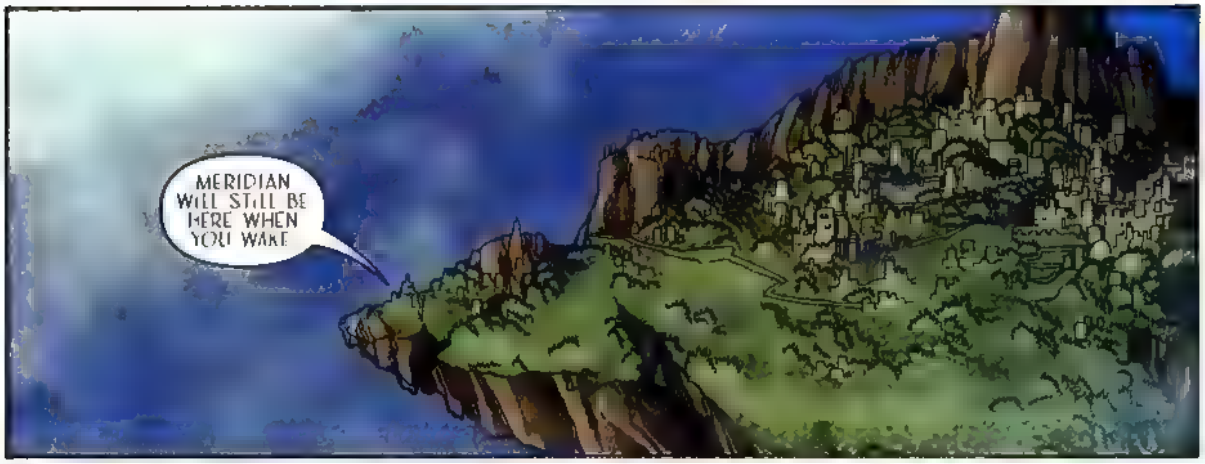
It had been replaced by a travesty of benign leadership in the form of an invasion force from Cadador
They hadn't governed Meridian in my absence
Meridian was
It didn't matter that ILAHN had claimed regency until I came of age. I had faced his trade forces, his special soldiers, and his

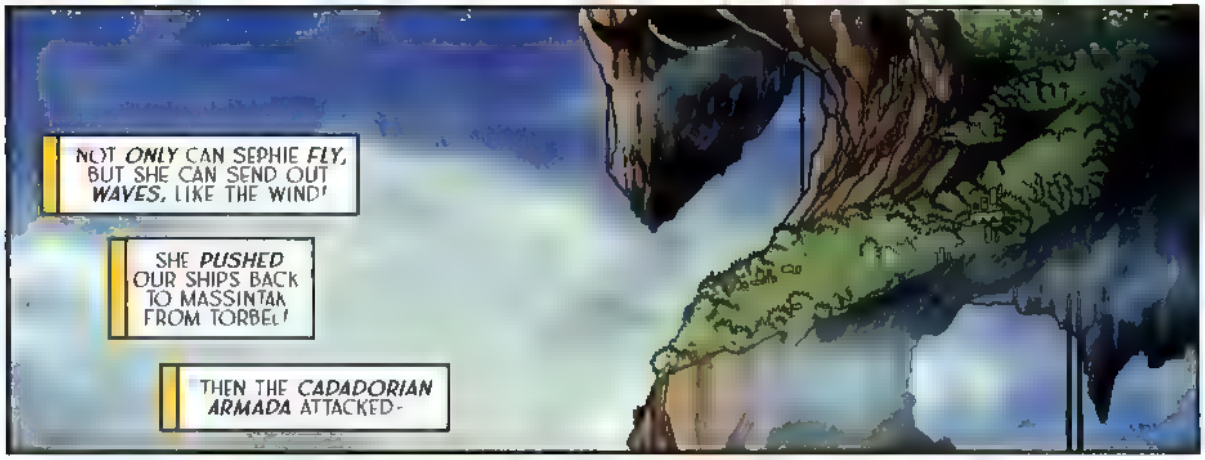

I was ready to face HIM for the right to govern my island
soon Cadador's stink would be removed
and Meridian could heal
YOU DOING OKAY THERE RENNER?
BEING RAISED IN THE LOWER CAVERNS DOESN'T MEAN I'M FRAGILE, COTSON!
YOU JOGGERS ALL THINK YOU INVENTED FIGHTING!
IT'S NOT AN INVENTION IT'S AN ART
ONE WE PRACTICE DAILY
DOESN'T TAKE MUCH PRACTICE OR SKILL TO BRING DOWN THESE RENTED SOLDIERS - THERE'S NO FIRE IN ANY OF THEM!
COTSON! FOLLOW SEPHE

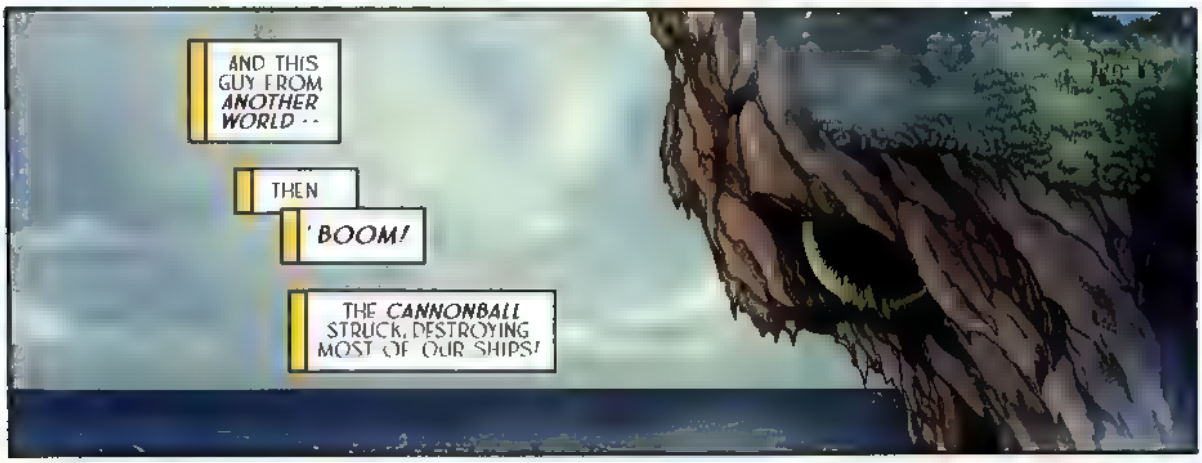
-- POWERS OR NO, SHE'S PUSHING HERSELF TOO FAR
GET ON BOARD!
AND CONGRATULATIONS! YOU MEN ARE LEAVING MERIDIAN ON ILAHN'S OWN SHIP!
NOT THAT HE'S HERE TO KNOW IT
PROUD OF YOURSELF?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN
YOU SELFISH LITTLE BRAT!
MINISTER LAHN AND YOU WERE BOTH GIVEN MIRACULOUS GIFTS!
-- YET YOU'VE USED YOURS TO CREATE PANIC AND DISORDER, WHILE HE'S USED HIS TO ENFORCE HIS BENEVOLENT LEADERSHIP OF CAPADOR!
PANIC AND DISORDER?
BUT...
AND ILAHN HAS--
YOU DON'T REALLY THINK ILAHN'S BENEVOLENT?
IS THAT BENEVOLENCE HE SHOWED THE PEOPLE OF TORBEL?
THEY CHOSE TO RENEGE ON THEIR CONTRACT!
THEY CHOSE THEIR FATE!
THEN YOU SHOULD CHOOSE
-- TO GET THAT SHIP AWAY FROM THIS ISLAND AND BE GLAD OUR SEPHIE DOESN'T WANT TO PLAY "TORBEL" WITH IT!
YAARK!
STUPID MOVE LETTING THEM GO
THEY'LL JUST RETURN WITH MORE
IF THEY DO, WE'LL BE READY
BUT I WON'T PUNISH THESE MEN FOR THE ORDERS GIVEN BY THEIR LEADER THEY'RE NOT THE ONES TO BLAME
SO YOU KEEP SAYING BUT I DON'T BUY IT
ANY ONE MAN CAN STAND UP FOR WHAT'S RIGHT!
YOU HEARD THEIR CAPTAIN HE THINKS OF ILAHN AS GOOD
IT TAKES WISDOM OR STRENGTH TO RECOGNIZE CORRUPT ON WHEN IT WEARS A NICE SUIT
NOT EVERYONE HAS THAT
MAYBE NOT EVERYONE'S AS WEAK AS YOU MAKE 'EM OUT TO BE
UNLESS YOU COMPARE 'EM TO SOMEBODY WHO CAN FLY AND PUSH PEOPLE AROUND
I'LL SEE TO THESE GUYS LEAVING, SEPH
YOU GO PUSH SOME MORE
FUNNY THING THERE

"YOU'RE STARTING TO SOUND JUST LIKE *DEREN*"
BETTER LET ME GO
SO, YEAH
I SAID *NEGOTIATION*, AND YOU'RE GIVING ME THREATS
THINK CLEARLY. YOU'VE GOT *ASSETS* TO BRING TO THE TABLE
BUT I DON'T SEE ANY EVIDENCE THAT WE SHOULD BE *AFRAID* OF *YOU*
YOU'RE RIGHT. YOU DON'T NEED TO BE AFRAID OF *ME*
YOU NEED TO BE AFRAID OF *HER*
OH
LADY, I THINK *WE'RE* THE ONES WITH THE *ADVANTAGE* IN THIS SITUATION
YOU MIGHT WANT TO THINK IN TERMS OF *NEGOTIATION*
FINE. LET ME GO, AND SPARE YOURSELF A WORLD OF PAIN
LET HER *GO!*
IT'S TRUE
SHE DOES


THAT'S THE LAST OF THEM. READY TO BE SHIPPED HOME PER YOUR ORDERS
AGAINST MY ADVICE
HE'S NOT HERE
HE WAS HERE BUT HE'S NOT
WHO WOULD HE ABANDON TO?
YOU MEAN ILAHN?
SEPHIE, LOOK AT YOU -- YOU'RE THE WALKING DEAD ALREADY AND YOU'RE LOOKING FOR MORE TROUBLE?
I'M ALL RIGHT
HERE SEPHIE
YOU MAY BE PERFECTLY ALL RIGHT, BUT YOU WERE ALSO SHIVERING
THANKS CRENNER
SEPHIE NEEDS REST
CRENNER GO FIND HER A PLACE TO LIE DOWN AND STAY WITH HER --
MAKE SURE SHE ISN'T DISTURBED
BUT ILAHN MIGHT -
ILAHN MIGHT FIND ME IN HIS FACE IF HE KEEPS YOU FROM GETTING SOME REST!
BUT
GO
SLEEP
NOW


MERIDIAN WILL STILL BE HERE WHEN YOU WAKE


NOT *ONLY* CAN SEPHIE *FLY*, BUT SHE CAN SEND OUT *WAVES*, LIKE THE WIND!
SHE *PUSHED* OUR SHIPS BACK TO MASSINTAK FROM TORBEL!
THEN THE *CADADORIAN ARMADA* ATTACKED-


AND THIS GUY FROM *ANOTHER WORLD* --
THEN
BOOM!
THE *CANNONBALL* STRUCK, DESTROYING MOST OF OUR SHIPS!

AND SEPHIE BATTLED THE WEAPON'S OWNER, RHO RHUSTANE, SINGLE-HANDEDLY-

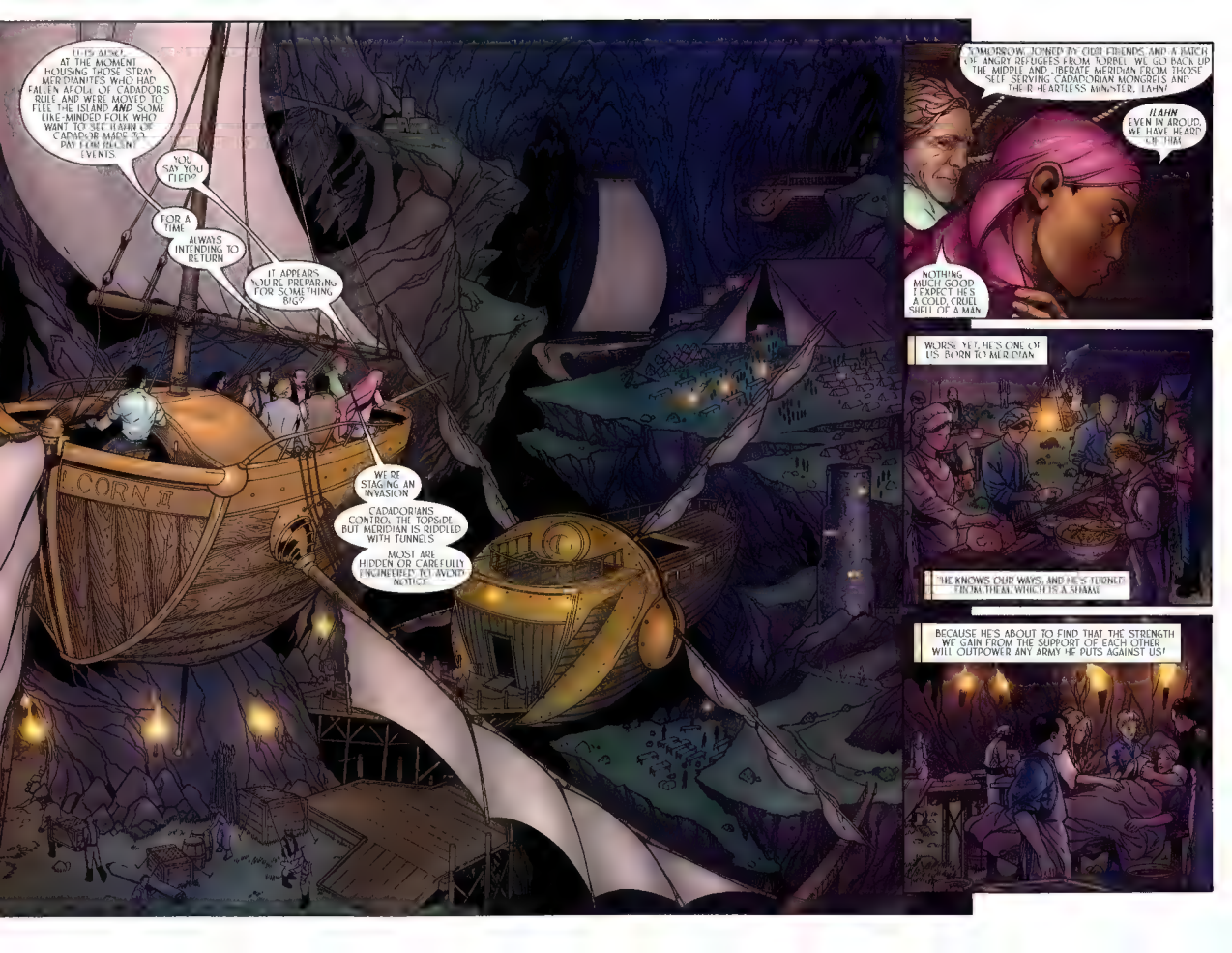
- LEAVING US WITH *THIS* BEAUTY
SEPHIE'S UP TOP RIGHT NOW
WE DECIDED I SHOULD BRING THE AIRSHIP TO BEACON NOTCH
TELL THEM ABOUT THE *BEAST*, TAD!
TELL THEM HOW *BRAVE* YOU WERE!

ALL I DID WAS PILOT A SHIP THROUGH TROUBLE, FEABIE
THAT'S NOTHING COMPARED TO WHAT SEPHIE'S DONE
JAD! STOP TALKING THAT WAY!
YOU'RE EVERY BIT THE HERO SHE IS!
WELCOME HOME, HERO!
IS THAT HOW YOU WERE TAUGHT TO TIE OFF A LINE?
DAD!
I DIDN'T EXPECT TO SEE YOU HERE!
WE RUSHED HOME TO PUT PLANS INTO MOTION AS SOON AS THE NEWS MADE IT TO HESPERIA
WE HEARD ABOUT TORBEL
I'M SORRY YOU HAD TO SEE THAT, JAD
LUCKILY, HESPERIAS ABOUT READY FOR HABITATION AND WE CAN OFFER IT TO THE SURVIVORS
NOW, CARE TO SHOW OFF THIS PRIZE YOU'VE CAPTURED?

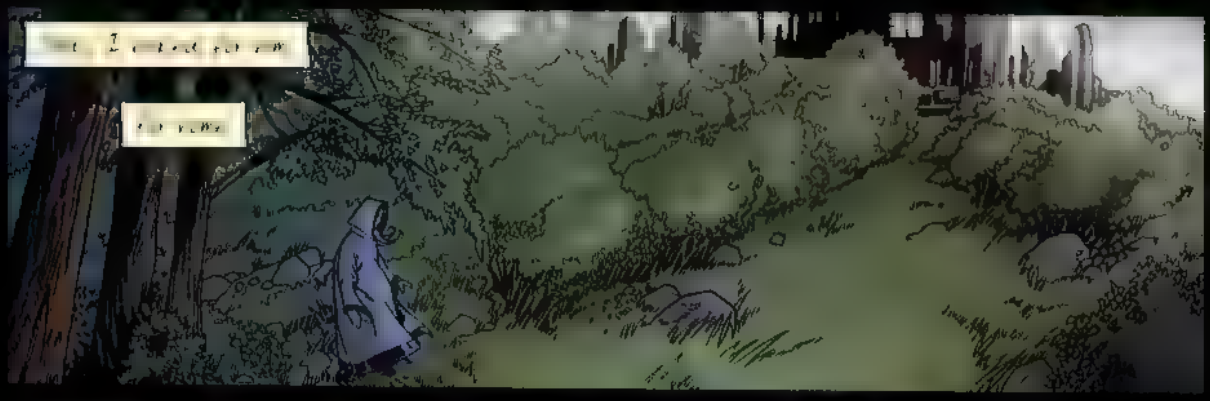
JAD HOW *IS* SEPHIE FARING?
HOW MUCH OF WHAT I'VE HEARD IS TRUE?
ALL OF IT
THEN IT'S A GOOD THING SHE'S ON OUR SIDE, ISN'T IT?
YEAH GOOD TO BE ON *HER* SIDE
OH
THERE'S BEEN A FALLING-OUT BETWEEN YOU TWO?
LET'S JUST SAY THERE'S NO *TWO* BETWEEN US, DAD AND THAT'S ALL I WANT TO SAY
HMMM
AS I WAS *SAYING*, THIS *AIRSHIP* OF YOURS APPEARS TO BE A FANCY MOBILE *ORE POD*
HOW'S IT HANDLE?
HOW DOES IT HEAT THE ORE?
THE ORE SUPPORTS IT STEAM BOILERS PROVIDE ITS THRUST EACH HAS AN INGENIOUS REGULATOR VALVE
IT CARRIES ITS CREW BENEATH THE POD
WHAT IS THAT STRANGE SMELL?
WHERE IS THE WEAPON HOUSE? JAD?
THE CANNON? IT'S ABOVE US FOLLOW THE *SMELL*
REMINDS ME OF SOME OF THE TOXIC ZONES ON THE SURFACE
CAN WE GO INSIDE THE POD?
WHAT'S OVER *HERE*?
SOMEBODY'S INSIDE!

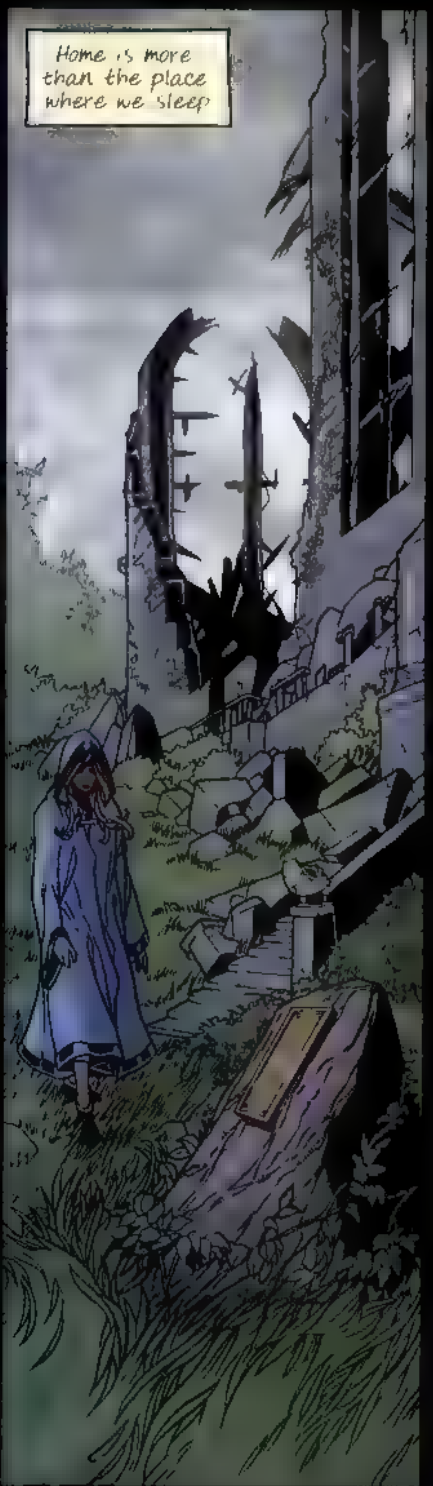
ARE YOU
W T HIM?
WHO ARE YOU AFRAID OF MISS?
HE SAID HIS NAME WAS RHO RHUSTANE HE
IT WAS AWFUL
YOU WERE HIS PRISONER?
COME WE'LL SEE YOU'RE CARED FOR, MISS ?
REESHA TERAMO OF AROUD
MAY I ASK WHO LEADS YOUR PEOPLE?
DEPENDS ON WHO YOU TALK TO
SOME WOULD SAY JON TAKARTY SOME'D SAY THE MINISTER SEPHIE

IN YOUR CASE, I'D HAVE TO SAY MIRA--
-- CAUSE IF WE DON'T DELIVER YOU TO HER TO BE LOOKED AT AND FUSSED OVER --
SHE'S LIKELY TO CAUSE US MORE PAIN THAN ANYONE ELSE
CAN'T HAVE THAT
JON! WE MEANT NO
I KNOW THE WOMAN IT'S ALL TRUE
I'LL TAKE YOU TO HER
WHA--
WHAT AM I SEEING
S MIRA YOUR LEADER?
YOU MIGHT SAY THAT
SHE'S MY WIFE
AND WHAT IS YOUR NAME?
JON TAKARTY MISS TERAMU
WATCH YOUR STEP HERE
WHAT ARE YOU?
DAD THAT WOMAN
DID YOU SEE HER EYES?
YES, A VERY HANDSOME BROWN
POOR WOMAN MUST HAVE BEEN QUITE A TRIAL
BROWN?
BUT--
COME ALONG JAD
WELCOME TO BEACON NOTCH, MISS TERAMU
THIS CAVERN IS HIDDEN INSIDE A CLEFT ON THE GROUND SIDE OF MERIDIAN


IT'S MINE. AT THE MOMENT HOUSING THOSE STRAY MERIDIANITES WHO HAD FALLEN AFOUL OF CADADOR'S RULE AND WERE MOVED TO FLEE THE ISLAND AND SOME LIKE-MINDED FOLK WHO WANT TO SEE HAHN OF CADADOR MADE TO PAY FOR HIS ILL EVENTS.
YOU SAY YOU FLED?
FOR A TIME
ALWAYS INTENDING TO RETURN
IT APPEARS YOU'RE PREPARING FOR SOMETHING BIG?
WE'RE STAGING AN INVASION
CADADORIANS CONTROL THE TOPSIDE BUT MERIDIAN IS RIDDLED WITH TUNNELS
MOST ARE HIDDEN OR CAREFULLY ENGINEERED TO AVOID NOTICE
TOMORROW, JOINED BY OUR FRIENDS, AND A BATCH OF ANGRY REFUGEES FROM TORBEL, WE GO BACK UP THE MIDDLE AND LIBERATE MERIDIAN FROM THOSE SELF-SERVING CADADORIAN MONGRELS AND THEIR HEARTLESS MINISTER, LAHN!
ILAHN
EVEN IN AROUD, WE HAVE HEARD OF HIM
NOTHING MUCH GOOD I EXPECT HE'S A COLD, CRUEL SHELL OF A MAN
WORSE YET, HE'S ONE OF US. BORN TO MERIDIAN.
HE KNOWS OUR WAYS, AND HE'S TURNED FROM THEM. WHICH IS A SHAME.
BECAUSE HE'S ABOUT TO FIND THAT THE STRENGTH WE GAIN FROM THE SUPPORT OF EACH OTHER WILL OUTPOWER ANY ARMY HE PUTS AGAINST US!

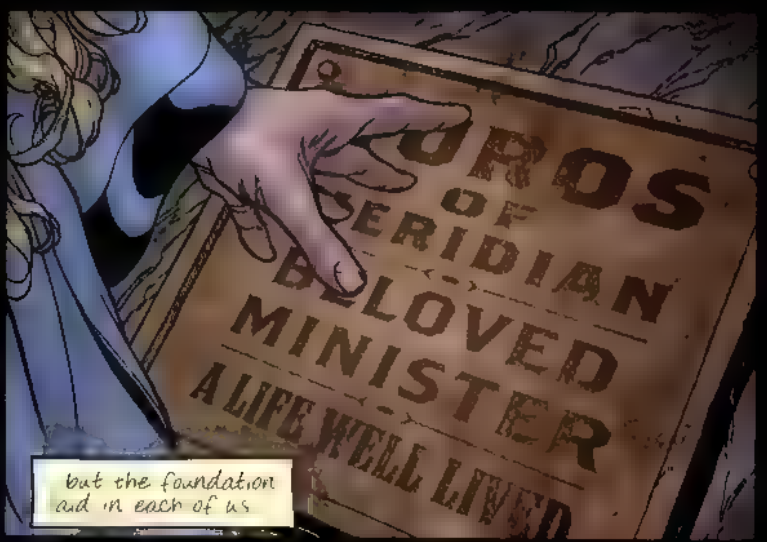
My first night home was spent tossing in troubled un-sleep
I craved rest, but couldn't find it in an unfamiliar bed in my very familiar world
Giving up any illusion of slumber, I crawled out to greet the sunrise
just as I used to d
But I'd never met morning alone before
Papa had always been there
Now he shines among the stars

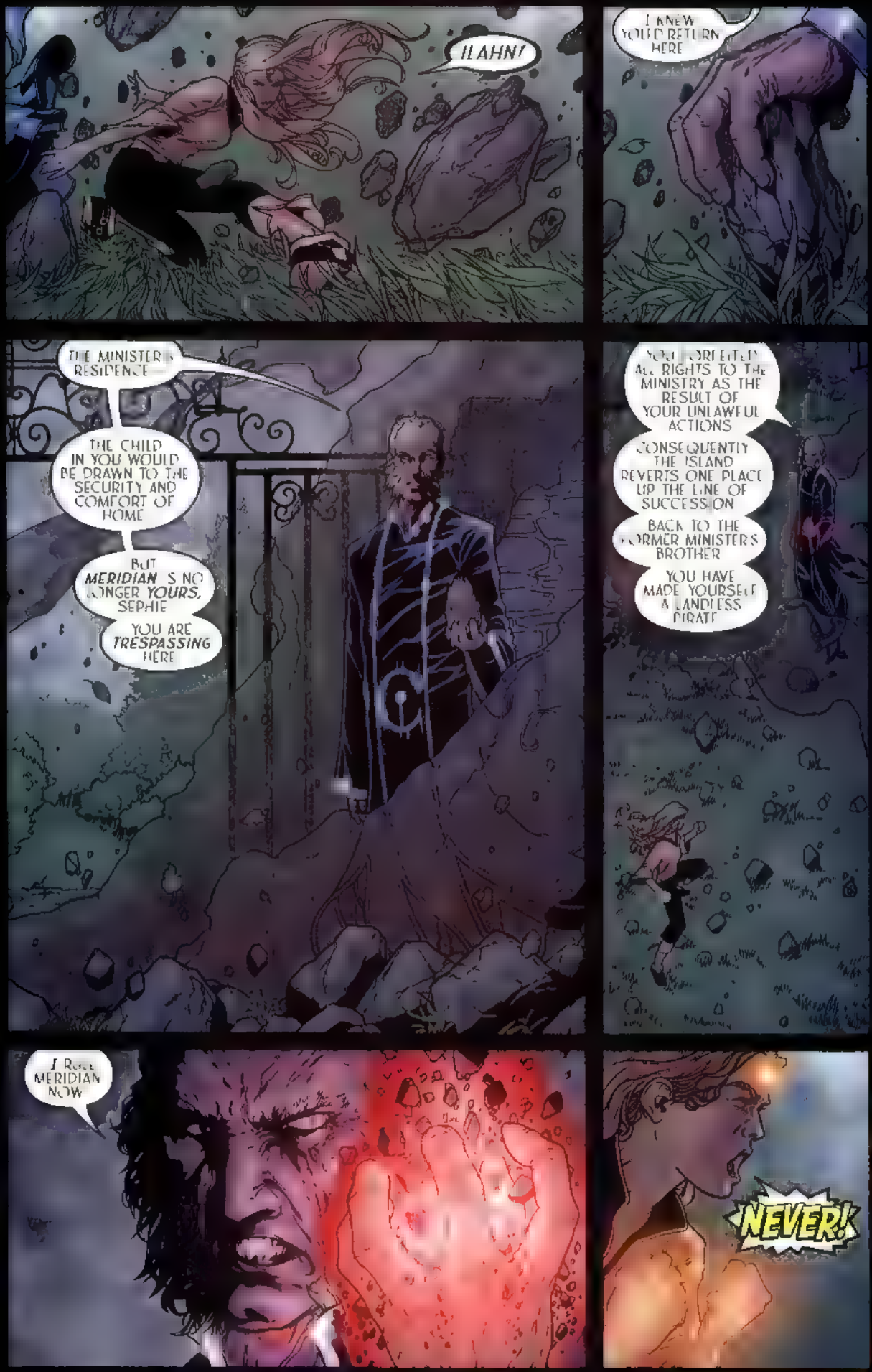



Home is more than the place where we sleep

t s the touchstone for our memories

.t s walls can be destroyed


ROS
OF
ERIDIAN
BELOVED
MINISTER
A LIFE WELL LIVED
but the foundation and in each of us


ILAHN!
I KNEW YOU'D RETURN HERE
THE MINISTER'S RESIDENCE
THE CHILD IN YOU WOULD BE DRAWN TO THE SECURITY AND COMFORT OF HOME
BUT MERIDIAN IS NO LONGER YOURS, SEPHIE
YOU ARE TRESPASSING HERE
YOU FORFEITED ALL RIGHTS TO THE MINISTRY AS THE RESULT OF YOUR UNLAWFUL ACTIONS
CONSEQUENTLY THE ISLAND REVERTS ONE PLACE UP THE LINE OF SUCCESSION
BACK TO THE FORMER MINISTER'S BROTHER
YOU HAVE MADE YOURSELF A LANDLESS PIRATE
I RULE MERIDIAN NOW
NEVER!

I'LL KILL YOU BEFORE THAT HAPPENS!

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Far away... on the world of Demetria explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

One of these islands is **Meridian**, home of shipbuilders and **Sephie**, the daughter of Minister Turos. Sephie's life has been spent being groomed to someday take over the ruling of Meridian. Her uncle **Ilahn** is the Minister of the rich city-state of Cadador, which controls most of the shipping and trade on Demetria.

When a mysterious force endows both brothers with the Sigil, a link to power, Turos (weakened by Ilahn's poisoning) dies, and his sigil is transferred to Sephie.

Ilahn gains the power to speed decay and create destruction. Sephie finds she has the power to force renewal, allowing her to heal, propel herself through the sky, and move things without touching them.

Ilahn tries, and fails, to control Sephie. Now he wants to gain control of all Demetria, beginning with his conquest of the island where he was born: Meridian.

Sephie's quest to rally support against Ilahn takes her to the waters surrounding Massintak, the step city, accompanied by a trio of loggers, a few cavern dwellers, and **Deren Beq**, whose stories of Sephie are outracing their flight, bringing them new volunteers. Sephie is reunited with **Jad**, who has brought along a small crew because of a vision from the **Muse of Giatan**. Romance is blossoming between Sephie and Jad, although Jad's been warned against *distracting* her.

Sephie's pirates, aided by new inventions from Massintak, have been successfully harassing the ships on Cadador's trade route to prove Ilahn can be stopped. A messenger from the endangered ironworking island of Torbel alerts the pirates, who rush to help, but arrive too late. Torbel falls, with great loss of life.

Ambushed by the Cadadorian armada, Sephie is surprised by a visit from another Sigil-Bearer, Samandahl Rey. Empathically connecting with him, she gains Sam's memories and knowledge before he disappears again. This information helps her against the new weapon **Rho Rhustane** introduces to Demetria: his airship's cannon. Losing their battle, Rho disappears, leaving his airship, which Sephie has Jad bring to Meridian's Beacon Notch. Sephie and Jad, so recently united, have parted awkwardly.

Sephie returns to a ruined Meridian. Her "topside" forces pack the remaining Cadadorian soldiers onto ships bound for Cadador. Jon Takarty leads the lowside forces who have discovered a hostage in Rho's airship...**Reesha Teramu**. They have no idea she's Ilahn's agent.

Unable to sleep, Sephie wanders toward her old home. In its ruins she finds Turos' memorial and a deadly surprise from Ilahn...

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I never did get any sleep until it was all over
...the day I killed Hahn

There have been many times since when I've felt anger
..but no emotion has come close to the all-consuming hatred that flushed through me when I learned what he'd done...
YOU MONSTER!
..what Ilahn truly was
AAH!

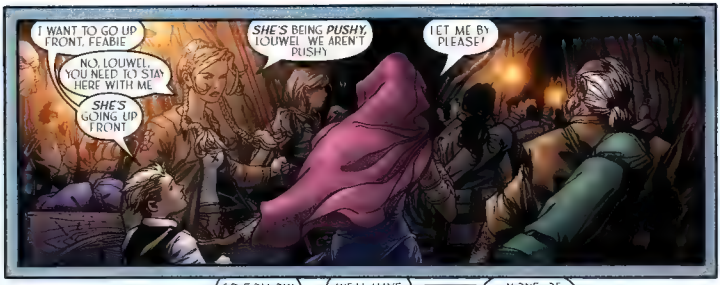
FIRST *TORBEL*, NOW *MERIDIAN* -- I'LL MAKE YOU *SUFFER* AS THEY HAVE!
THIS *SAVAGE* STRATEGY OF YOURS IS BEST FIT FOR AN *ANIMAL*...
...A WOUNDED KITTEN, PERHAPS.
IT DOESN'T SUIT YOU, SEPHIE. YOU FAIL TO ACHIEVE THE EFFECT YOU'RE AFTER.
..*FEAR* CANNOT BE INSPIRED BY AN INSINCERE FURY.
YOU'D BE WISE TO *LEARN* RAGE BEFORE ATTEMPTING TO EMPLOY IT TO YOUR ADVANTAGE.
KREEESH
AS *THREATS* GO, CHILD...
...YOU'RE MERELY AN AMATEUR.

I'M NOT THE LITTLE GIRL YOU REMEMBER, UNCLE ILAHN!
Oh, YES, YOU ARE!
TAKE THIS WHOLE PIRATE NONSENSE --WHILE YOUR MISTAKES WERE MANY, YOUR SUCCESSES FEW--
--ALL YOUR MOVES WERE OVERPLAYED
SKRAAAW
TOO PUBLIC
SOMEONE HAD TO STOP YOU!
KRSSSHKKK
GNNH!

YOU TRIED TO UNSEAT ME, CHILD
YOU'VE FAILED
ALL YOU'VE DONE IS HAND ME THE RIGHT TO TAKE ANY ACTION IN MY POWER TO RESTORE SUPPLY LINES AND REINSTATE TRADE
INCLUDING YOUR DEATH
MAKE NO MISTAKE, SEPHIE --
YOU WON'T BE LEAVING MERIDIAN AGAIN
EXCEPT TO JOIN TUROS AND IDERIA
ONCE YOU ARE ELIMINATED, ALL YOUR FELLOW INSURRECTIONISTS WILL BE ROUNDED UP.
...AND EXECUTED
THAT WILL BE YOUR LEGACY, SEPHIE --
--DEATH FOR YOU AND ALL YOUR FRIENDS!

DON'T BE AFRAID, REESHA--
--YOU'LL BE IN NO DANGER.
THESE TUNNELS HAVE EXISTED SINCE THE CATACLYSM, ALTHOUGH THEY'VE BEEN CLEARED AND EXPANDED SINCE THAT TIME
WITH NO ORE PODS TO SERVICE, THE CAVERNS AT MERIDIAN'S BASE ARE RARELY USED--
--MANY PEOPLE DON'T KNOW HOW EXTENSIVE THE NETWORK OF PATHWAYS TRULY IS --
-- BUT THE CENTER ROAD IS NOW THE PATHWAY BACK TO THE SURFACE OF OUR BELOVED ISLAND
WE EXPECT TO ENCOUNTER RESISTANCE FROM THE CADMORIAN SOLDIERS STATIONED TOPSIDE, WHICH IS THE REASON WE'RE STAGGERED AS WE ARE

THE VERY YOUNG AND THE VERY OLD GO LAST
BEFORE THEM GO THE MATURE WORKERS
THE STRONGEST OF OUR YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN
WITH JON AND JAD AT THE LEAD
YOUR HUSBAND, JON TAKARTY?
THE MINISTER OF MERIDIAN?
OH, HE'S NOT THE MINISTER. HE'S JUST THIS EXPEDITION'S LEADER
OUR MINISTER, SEPHIE, IS LEADING THE FORCES WHO WENT TOPSIDE TO SECURE THE DOCKS, WHERE MOST OF THE CATADORIANS ARE STATIONED
WE'LL MEET UP WITH THEM WHEN--
EXCUSE ME--
REESHA! WAIT!
I CAN'T!

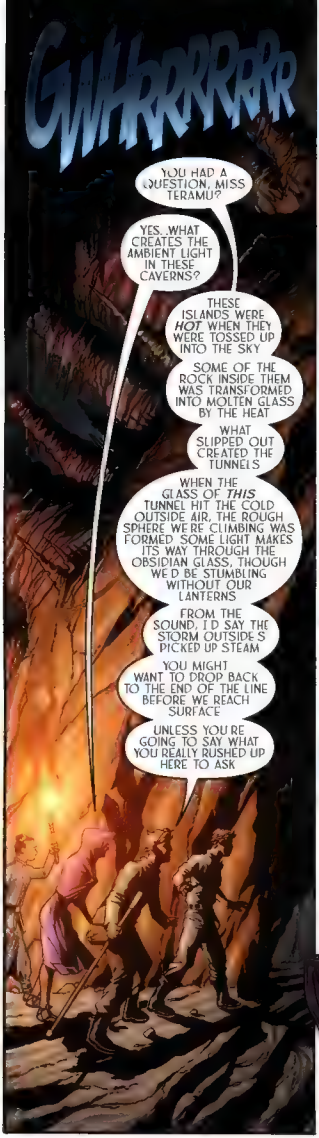

I WANT TO GO UP FRONT, FEABIE
NO, LOUWEL. YOU NEED TO STAY HERE WITH ME
SHE'S GOING UP FRONT
SHE'S BEING PUSHY, LOUWEL. WE AREN'T PUSHY.
LET ME BY PLEASE!

I'D FOLLOW THAT
WE'LL HAVE TO --
--NONE OF US CAN MOVE AT THAT SPEED THESE DAYS!
OH, MY!
EXCUSE ME!

LET ME PASS BY, PLEASE YOUR LEADER -- I MUST SPEAK WITH HIM
JON? HE'S JUST UP THERE
SO RIGHT ON AHEAD IT'S REESHA, ISN'T IT?
YES IT IS.
DAD, WE'VE GOT A VIS! --
HOLD UP, EVERYONE!

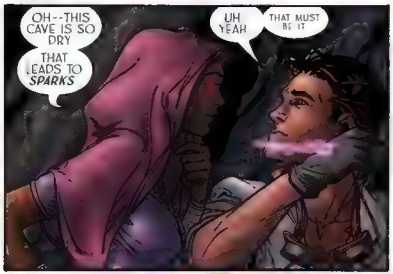
GWHRRRRRRRR
THIS IS WHERE IT GETS TRICKY

JUST KEEP TO THE CENTER AND FOCUS ON THE CAVE AT THE NEXUS
ONCE INSIDE, VEER LEFT AND TAKE THE SECOND SPINE OUT.
STAY ALERT, NOW WE DON'T NEED TO LOSE ANYONE TO SIMPLE CARELESSNESS
AS YOU HAVE SAID AT LEAST FIVE TIMES ALREADY, DAD! LET'S GO!
WE'LL BE FINE!
IT'S NOT AS IF THE CADADORIANS WILL HAVE MADE IT DOWN PAST THE TRAPS!
SIGH.
MOVE ALONG, PEOPLE
JON TAKARTY?
MAY I HAVE A WORD?
WAIT TIL WE'RE ACROSS, MISS TERAMU.
LAST ONE OVER DOESN'T GET A CRACK AT ILAHN!
FUNNY VERY FUNNY


GWHRRRRRRR
YOU HAD A QUESTION, MISS TERAMU?
YES...WHAT CREATES THE AMBIENT LIGHT IN THESE CAVERNS?
THESE ISLANDS WERE *HOT* WHEN THEY WERE TOSSED UP INTO THE SKY
SOME OF THE ROCK INSIDE THEM WAS TRANSFORMED INTO MOLTEN GLASS BY THE HEAT
WHAT SLIPPED OUT CREATED THE TUNNELS
WHEN THE GLASS OF *THIS* TUNNEL HIT THE COLD OUTSIDE AIR, THE ROUGH SPHERE WE'RE CLIMBING WAS FORMED. SOME LIGHT MAKES ITS WAY THROUGH THE OBSIDIAN GLASS, THOUGH WE'D BE STUMBLING WITHOUT OUR LANTERNS
FROM THE SOUND, I'D SAY THE STORM OUTSIDE'S PICKED UP STEAM
YOU MIGHT WANT TO DROP BACK TO THE END OF THE LINE BEFORE WE REACH SURFACE
UNLESS YOU'RE GOING TO SAY WHAT YOU REALLY RUSHED UP HERE TO ASK

YEAH *REESHA*, RIGHT? WHY *ARE* YOU SO INTERESTED IN BEING UP FRONT?
IT'S DANGEROUS, HERE, YOU KNOW
I'M NOT AFRAID

ZZZZZT
ARE *YOU*?
OW!


OH--THIS CAVE IS SO DRY
THAT LEADS TO *SPARKS*
UH YEAH
THAT MUST BE IT

GWHRRRRRRRRR
DAD!

APPEARS IT'S NOT THE STORM MAKING THAT NOISE
GWARRRRRR
MOVE THEM BACK JAD
DAD
DO IT
I'LL KEEP HER DISTRACTED
GWARRRRR
NO, DAD!

JAD!
GAAAARRRR
RUNNNNH!
NOOO!
SPLURTCH
GHHRK
OH THIS ISN'T GOOD
KRNNNTCHLURK

FWASH!
OH!
UH, DAD? WHA- ?
JAD? BY THE STARS SON--
I'D SAY SEPHIE!
SHE MUST HAVE--
WHEN WE--
IF THIS WORKS LIKE HERS--
WHAT JUST HAPPENED?
AH

WHAM
JAD
THIS'LL BE OVER QUICK!
HOW INTERESTING
AMAZING!
DIDN'T HURT A BIT
ME, ANYWAYS
BUT LET'S GET THROUGH THIS CAVE AND GONE BEFORE SHE WAKES UP

SO YOU CAN ATTACK ILAHN?
KZK
KLZZKT
LET'S NOT
YOU SHOULD HAVE LET THE BEAST BE THE DEATH OF YOU

BECAUSE *I'M* TAKING COMMAND OF THIS ARMY, AND ITS FORMER LEADER IS NEVER LEAVING THIS CAVERN
STAND BACK DAD
I SAW WHAT SEPHIE COULD DO --
IF I'M THE SAME NOW, I CAN FORCE HER AWAY --
UNNH
OR FLY HER OUT OF --
HMM
OH, YOU SILLY LITTLE BOY. IT TAKES *PRACTICE*.
AND I'VE HAD *PLENTY*
JAD--
TAKE THE OTHERS AND GO *ON*, DAD!
SHE'S NOT GETTING THROUGH ME TO YOU!

HOW NOBLE
KZZZT
SUITABLE LAST WORDS, JAD TAKARTY
--NN--
THIS IS THE PRICE FOR EVEN *IMAGINING* THAT *YOU* WOULD HAVE THE POWER TO DEFY *ILAHN*--
IF YOUR *LIGHTNING'S* ALL YOU'VE GOT TO KEEP ME FROM HIM, I'LL BE FINDING OUT SOON ENOUGH!
YOU *ARE* REMARKABLY STRONG
TO WHICH OF THE FIRST ARE YOU INDEBTED FOR *YOUR* GIFT OF POWER?

THE FIRST WHAT?
SEPHIE'S THE ONE WHO DID THIS TO ME!
SEPHIE ?
GO!
NOW!
IT'S GETTING HARDER TO HOLD HER!
SEPHIE!
BUT THEN ILAHN
GO!
KRKKKK
KRAAAKK
KRAK
THIS CAN'T BE
DAD?

KREEEESH
KRAKK
YOU'RE FADING. OUT OF POWER?
LET GO!
NEVER
WE FALL TOGETHER
NOOOO!
RHO RHUSTANE!
HELP ME!
RHO?
WHAT'S HE GOT TO DO WITH --
YOU?

There had always been a connection between Jad Tatarby and myself
I'd unknowingly made it something more
given him some measure of the power I held... along with... some of my heart
I'M COMING!
SEPHIE?
JAD?
This remarkable bond made me AWARE that he was in mortal danger
It would have been so easy to save him
YOU'RE NOT GOING ANYWHERE!
except I couldn't go

At Ilahn's touch, another bond was made
But I fought this one
NO!
IDERIA!
I DON'T WANT TO KNOW YOU LIKE I KNOW SAM!
Ilahn had loved Ideria, my mother, and lost her to Taros, my father
That, I knew
What I hadn't suspected was the level of obsession his love had reached
My Uncle Ilahn had killed one Minister of Meridian
He wouldn't hesitate to kill another
Papa didn't die because of the sigil!
He died because his own brother had been poisoning him

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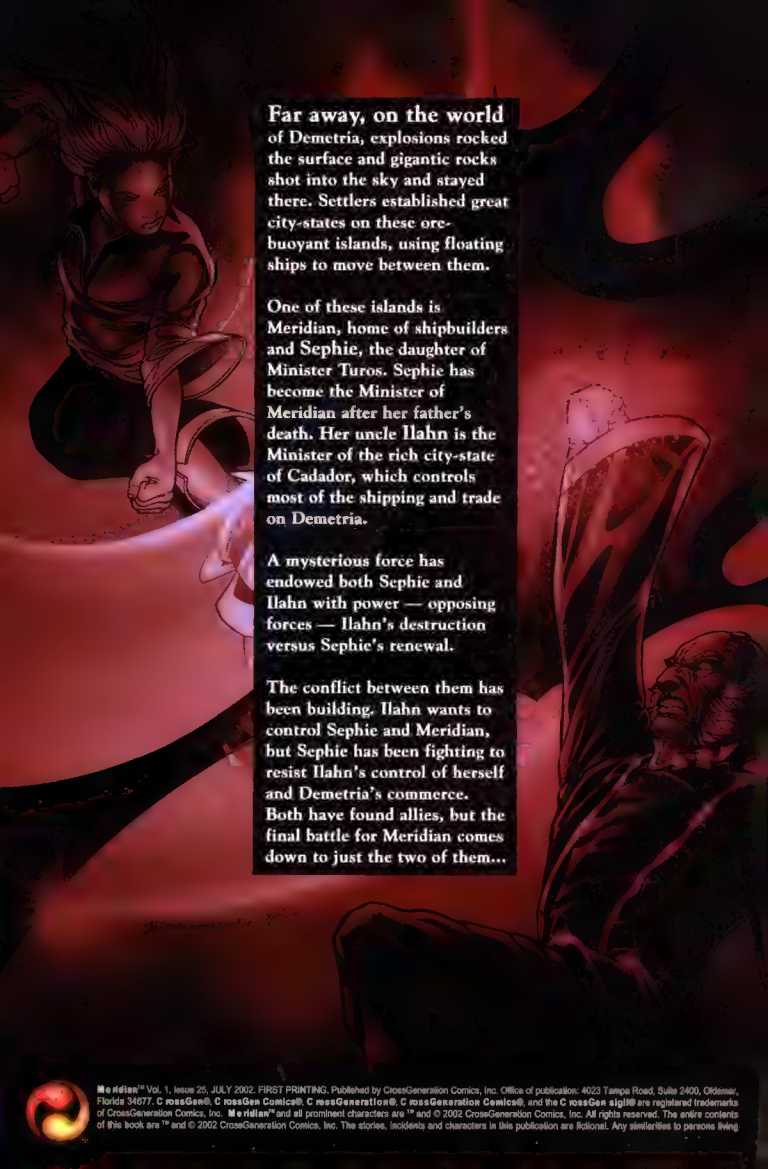

Far away, on the world of Demetria, explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.
One of these islands is Meridian, home of shipbuilders and Sephie, the daughter of Minister Turos. Sephie has become the Minister of Meridian after her father's death. Her uncle Ilahn is the Minister of the rich city-state of Cadador, which controls most of the shipping and trade on Demetria.
A mysterious force has endowed both Sephie and Ilahn with power — opposing forces — Ilahn's destruction versus Sephie's renewal.
The conflict between them has been building. Ilahn wants to control Sephie and Meridian, but Sephie has been fighting to resist Ilahn's control of herself and Demetria's commerce. Both have found allies, but the final battle for Meridian comes down to just the two of them...

Meridian™ Vol. 1, Issue 25, JULY 2002. FIRST PRINTING. Published by CrossGeneration Comics, Inc. Office of publication: 4023 Tampa Road, Suite 2400, Oldsmar, Florida 34677. **CrossGen®**, **CrossGen Comics®**, **CrossGeneration®**, **CrossGeneration Comics®**, and the **CrossGen sigil®** are registered trademarks of CrossGeneration Comics, Inc. **Meridian**™ and all prominent characters are ™ and © 2002 CrossGeneration Comics, Inc. All rights reserved. The entire contents of this book are ™ and © 2002 CrossGeneration Comics, Inc. The stories, incidents and characters in this publication are fictional. Any similarities to persons living

I KNOW I DIE!
PATIENCE!
RHO RHUSTANE!
HELP ME!
MUST I BE DISTURBED?
BAD ENOUGH I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO BE HERE ON ELYSIA BUT THEN YOU HAVE TO GET YOURSELF IN TROUBLE?
BUT YOU PROMISED
REESHA TERAMU, YOU ARE THE MOST INFURIATINGLY PERSISTENT BEING I HAVE EVER HAD THE MISFORTUNE OF COUNTING AMONG MY MINIONS
WELCOME TO MY DOMAIN

THIS IS YOUR HOME?
THE GUEST QUARTERS
I'M STAYING OUT OF THE MAIN HOUSE UNTIL I'VE HAD A CHANCE TO PRESENT MY CASE TO LADY INGRA
THE GUEST QUARTERS
WHERE I HAVE NO INTENTION OF HOUSING GUESTS!
YOU'RE NOT STAYING HERE, REESHA
I'VE ANSWERED YOUR CALL, SAVED YOU FROM DANGER, AND NOW IT'S TIME TO SEND YOU HOME
YOUR PREFERRED DESTINATION ON DEMETRIA WOULD BE..?
RHO RHUSTANE, I'M DISAPPOINTED IN YOU
I THOUGHT YOU WERE A GOD, AND YET--
--KNOWING I'VE TASTED THE POWER YOU CAN BESTOW--
--YOU'D LET ME LEAVE WITHOUT MORE?
YOU'VE BEEN TOUCHED BY THE GODS AND YOU DARE ASK FOR MORE?
TOUCHED BY A GOD ASSIGNED BY HIS MINISTER TO WATCH OVER ILAHN
ILAHN AND I HAVE BECOME CLOSE.
I COULD BE YOUR EYES ON HIM--
--BUT I'D NEED SOME WAY TO PROTECT MYSELF IF DISCOVERED

IT IS *YOUR* DECISION, RHO
NNNNNH!
BUT IT WOULD *FREE* YOU FROM HAVING TO BE NEAR ILAHN AGAIN
GNNNNNHH--
BUT I'M *SURE* YOU COULD CONVINCE MINISTER *INGRA* TO RELEASE YOU FROM THAT OBLIGATION
HHHHYOU--!
YOU--!
YOU!
UNNNH--
THAT SENSATION RAGE. MADNESS
HAVE I EXPECTED TOO MUCH OF A GOD?
ENOUGH!
CEASE YOUR TONGUE'S BATTERING, WOMAN--
--IT IS *DONE!*

When I was a child, I looked forward to the days when my Uncle Ilahn would visit
There were always gifts from exotic cities, and tales of places I'd never seen and could barely imagine
JAD
JAD?
YOU CAN TELL YOUR LITTLE PLAYMATE IS IN DANGER FROM HERE?
HOW?
IT MUST BE THE SIGIL'S DOING HOW DID YOU LEARN TO EXPAND ITS CAPABILITIES?
TELL ME!
NO! STAY BACK!
I loved his visits
I loved him
He loved me
We were FAMILY, after all
SO, I AM RIGHT
YOU ARE AVOIDING MY TOUCH
I'll never look forward to seeing him again
Which is sad, because I have no other family
GO AHEAD!
RUN TO HIM
just others I love

SAVE HIM
BUT KNOW THAT ALL OF MERIDIAN WILL PAY THE PRICE
The duties of Minister are simple govern all facets of an island's business
The responsibilities include taking any steps necessary to protect the island from danger
Papa had warned me that some decisions would be painful
then coached me through making them
and living with my decisions

When he threatened Meridian, Iiahn forced me to make a sacrifice he knew I was duty-bound to make
I had to stay
Protect Meridian
Let Jad fall
GO AHEAD GIRL!
WHAT ARE YOU AFRAID OF?
if there'd been no people on Meridian
my choice might have been different

YOU REMAIN
IT'S BEST THIS WAY--
YOUR BLOODLINE DESERVES BETTER THAN THAT TAKARTY MONGREL!
HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT?
YOU DON'T KNOW HIM!
JAD IS
...
WHO?
I CAN'T FEEL HIM ANYMORE
HE'S DEAD!
HOW DID YOU DO THAT?
HOW DID YOU KILL HIM?
IT WASN'T MY DOING, SEPHIE
What followed was a gruesome tug-of-war
Ilahn's destruction versus my renewal
With Meridian on the line
SEE THAT GLOW?

THERE'S SEPHIE
GUESS NOW WE KNOW WHERE SHE WANDERED OFF TO
WHO'S SHE FIGHTING?
HARD TO SEE IN THE STORM, BUT I'M BETTING IT'S THE MINISTER OF CADADOR.
ILAHN
SHE DID SAY HE GOT MARKED, THE SAME AS HER
THEY'RE NOT ALONE--I SEE SOME SIGN OF GROUND ACTION BEYOND THEM, COTSON--
WE MIGHT HAVE MISSED SOME OF THE CADADORS
YOUR FINGERS ITCHING FOR A FIST AGAIN, DEREN?
SHE COULD PROBABLY USE OUR HELP
THEN WHAT'RE WE WAITING FOR?

LET'S CHASE TROUBLE AND GET UP THERE!
HOW DOES SHE DO THAT?
CRENNER. DEREN'S FROM AN INBRED LINE THAT NEVER LEARNED TO USE MODERN CONVENIENCES LIKE LADDERS
ME, I'M HOOFING IT DOWN TO SAFETY LIKE A CIVILIZED CREATURE
YOU WITH ME OR HER?
COMING ALONG, RASE?
DEREN WHY DO YOU HATE ME?
YOU KNOW MINISTER GERESLI HAVE ME SKINNED IF ANY HARM COMES TO HIS ONLY GRANDCHILD
YOU'RE RIGHT, RASE
HE SHOULDN'T BE ON THE ROOF
COME WITH US
DOESN'T REALLY MATTER -- EITHER TRAIL WILL LEAD YOU CLOSER TO SEPHIE, SO I KNOW YOU'RE FOLLOWING ONE OF US

WE'RE GOING TO TAKE A WALK TOWARD THE CENTER OF THE ISLAND YOU CAN PROTECT CRENNER AND SEE THE SIGHTS
ARE YOU SURE YOU HEARE VOICES?
FROM INSIDE THE CAVE
THEN THE MERDANITES AND THEIR SPIES ARE ON THEIR WAY BACK UP
CHICKENHEARTED COWARD RUNAWAYS WE'LL GIVE THEM A CADADORIAN WELCOME WHEN THEY COME OUT
WHAT ABOUT GOING IN - MEETING THEM COMING?
YOU BRING A TORCH STEYVART?
YOU'RE RIGHT IT'S TOO DARK WITHOUT
WE'LL SURPRISE THEM HERE
GO
WEREN'T WE SUPPOSED TO
HOLD
KEEP QUIET! FORGOT!

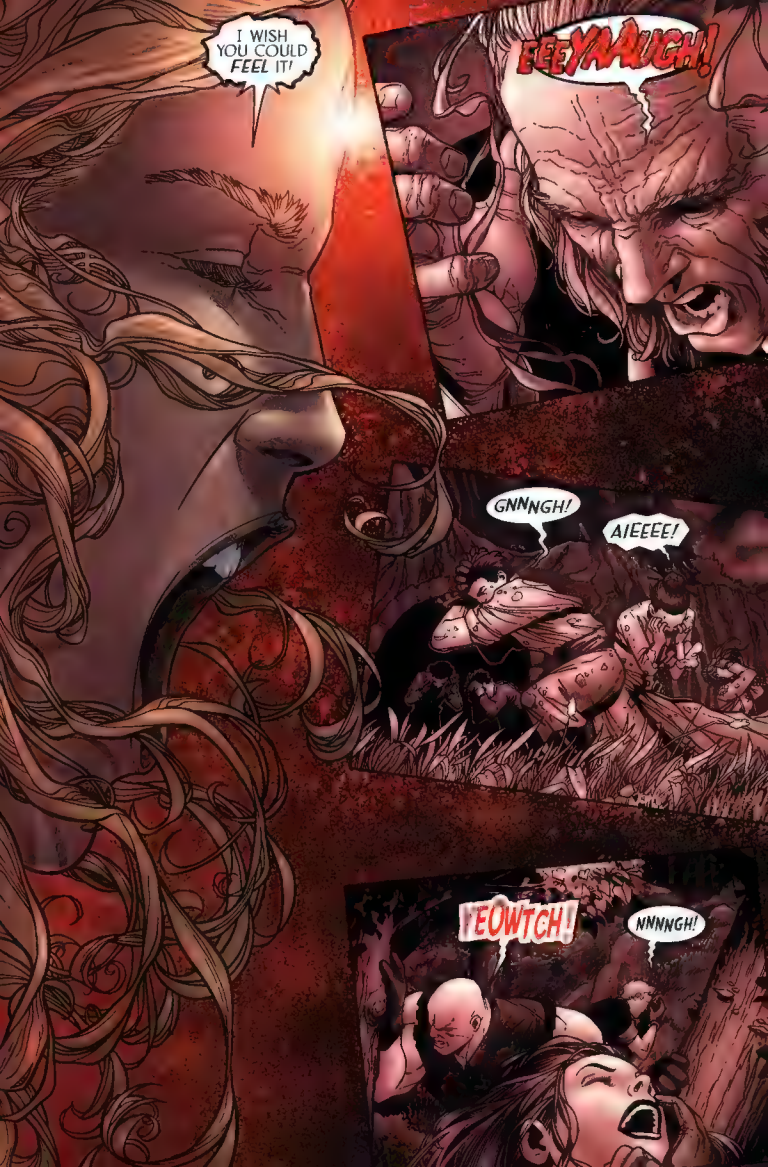
A HEY!
THEY'RE NOT IN...!
NO... THEY'RE UP!
THAT'S FOR WHAT YOU'VE DONE TO MERIDIAN!
AND THIS...
KRKKK
S FOR MY SON
JON, WE DON'T KNOW THAT JAD'S DEAD
AFTER ALL...

-- HE SAID SEPHIE GAVE HIM THAT GIFT OF STRANGE ENERGY AND JUST LOOK AT HER!

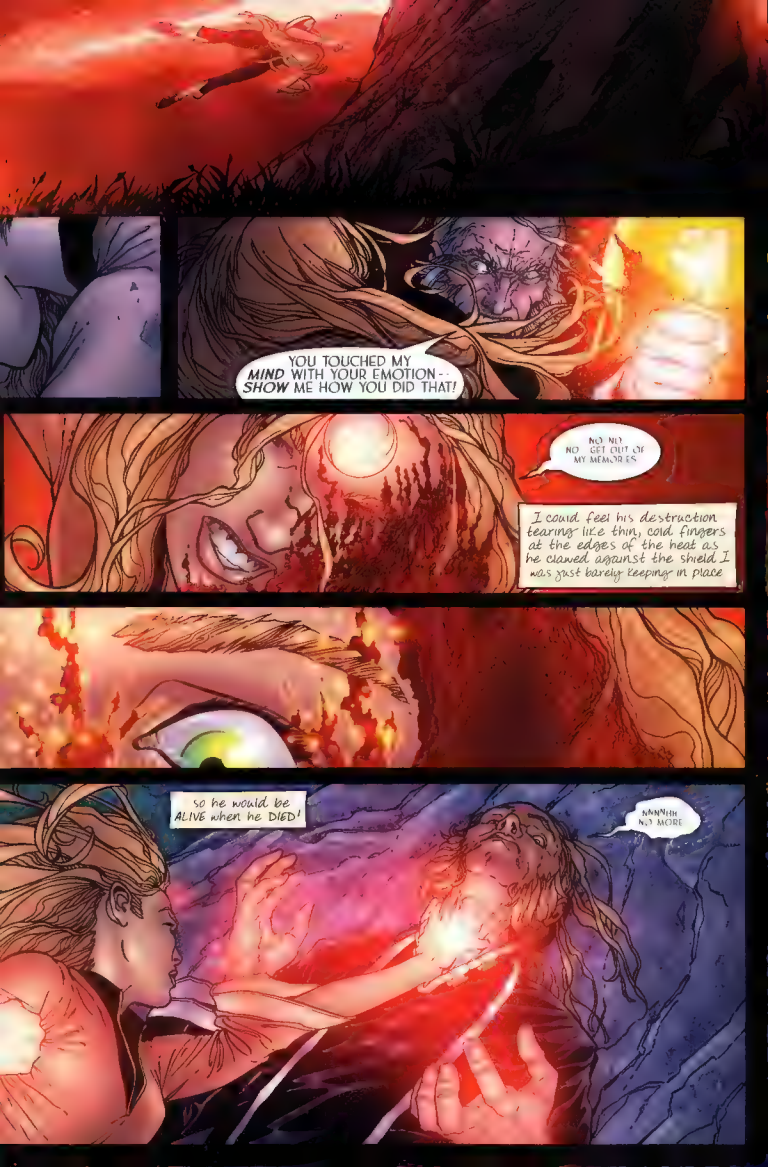
AAAH!
THAT'S ILAHN--IT MUST BE!
SEPHIE SAID HE'D BECOME ABLE TO DESTROY WITH A TOUCH!
MAY THE STARS SHINE BRIGHT ON HER--THERE'S NOTHING MORE WE CAN DO TO HELP HER NOW!
SO TRUE, JAN. POOR CHILD.
ISAGO, THIS ALL CAME FROM WHAT HAPPENED ON THAT TERRIBLE NIGHT TUROS DIED
SEPHIE IS AMAZING ENOUGH, BUT THE TWO OF THEM--
IT'S A BATTLE WE'LL TELL OF SEEING FOR THE REST OF OUR LIVES
I'm not particularly proud of my actions that day.
but, however selfishly, I did what had to be done.

Although my mind was set -- Ilahn would die --
I still shied away from getting too close
Lucky
RMMMMBLE
GNNGF!
KRAAAK
KRK
my ability to force things to go the way I want them to
KLATTR KRAK
let me put an end to the stalemate from a distance
Temporarily

I was going to have to work harder to ensure he didn't survive.
GO RIGHT AHEAD, SEPHIE
STOP ME
CATCH ME
I'D LIKE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE EXCHANGE OF ENERGY AND MEMORY THAT OCCURS WHEN WE TOUCH
SO I CAN SEE MORE OF HOW YOU POISONED MY FATHER?
I THOUGHT YOU WERE JUST SELFISH, NOT EVIL--
BUT WHAT LITTLE I SAW INSIDE YOUR HEAD SHOWED ME THE TRUTH!
YOU'RE A MONSTER!
I HATE YOU!


I WISH YOU COULD FEEL IT!
EEEYAAUGH!
GNNNGH!
AIEEEE!
EOWTCH!
NNNNGH!

THERE WILL BE NO MODE OF THAT!
GNFH
KRAKK
NNNNH
My brain was BURNING
Keeping Ilahn from my memories, was the most painful sensation I've ever known
SHOW ME!
So I tapped into that part of me that renews
STAY OUT STAY OUT, STAY OUT OF
ME!
Being healed, paradoxically, seemed to cause Ilahn greater pain
So I healed as hard as I could


YOU TOUCHED MY MIND WITH YOUR EMOTION - - SHOW ME HOW YOU DID THAT!
NO NO NO GET OUT OF MY MEMORIES
I could feel his destruction tearing like thin, cold fingers at the edges of the heat as he leaned against the shield I was just barely keeping in place
so he would be ALIVE when he DIED!
WARMTH NO MORE

I was so caught up in my furg.. there was no moral quandary in my decision to kill
It was just my right
My job
YOU'LL NEVER DO THAT AGAIN!
I wanted to kill him
So I was going to kill him
And I would have killed him...
. except he went away.
DISAPPEARED
Just as I had witnessed Samandahl Reyr and Rho Rhustane do...

IT'S OVER, MIRA
SEPHIE'S KILLED ILAHN
so I missed my chance to kill him
the day I killed Ilahn
GOOD
AFTER WHAT HAPPENED TO TORBEL...
TO JAD
...HE DESERVED IT
Except I WANTED to kill Ilahn
and everybody had been touched by my emotion
SHE DID IT!
HE'S DEAD?
LOOKS THAT WAY
I could feel it all
Their shock
horror
revulsion
disappointment...
I didn't kill Ilahn

but that's not
what THEY saw

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A mysterious force has endowed both Sephie and Ilahn with power — opposing forces — Ilahn's destruction versus Sephie's renewal.

Ilahn wants to control Sephie — and Meridian — but Sephie has been fighting to resist Ilahn's control of herself and Demetria's commerce. The conflict between them erupts into a battle, during which Ilahn disappears...apparently dead at Sephie's hands.

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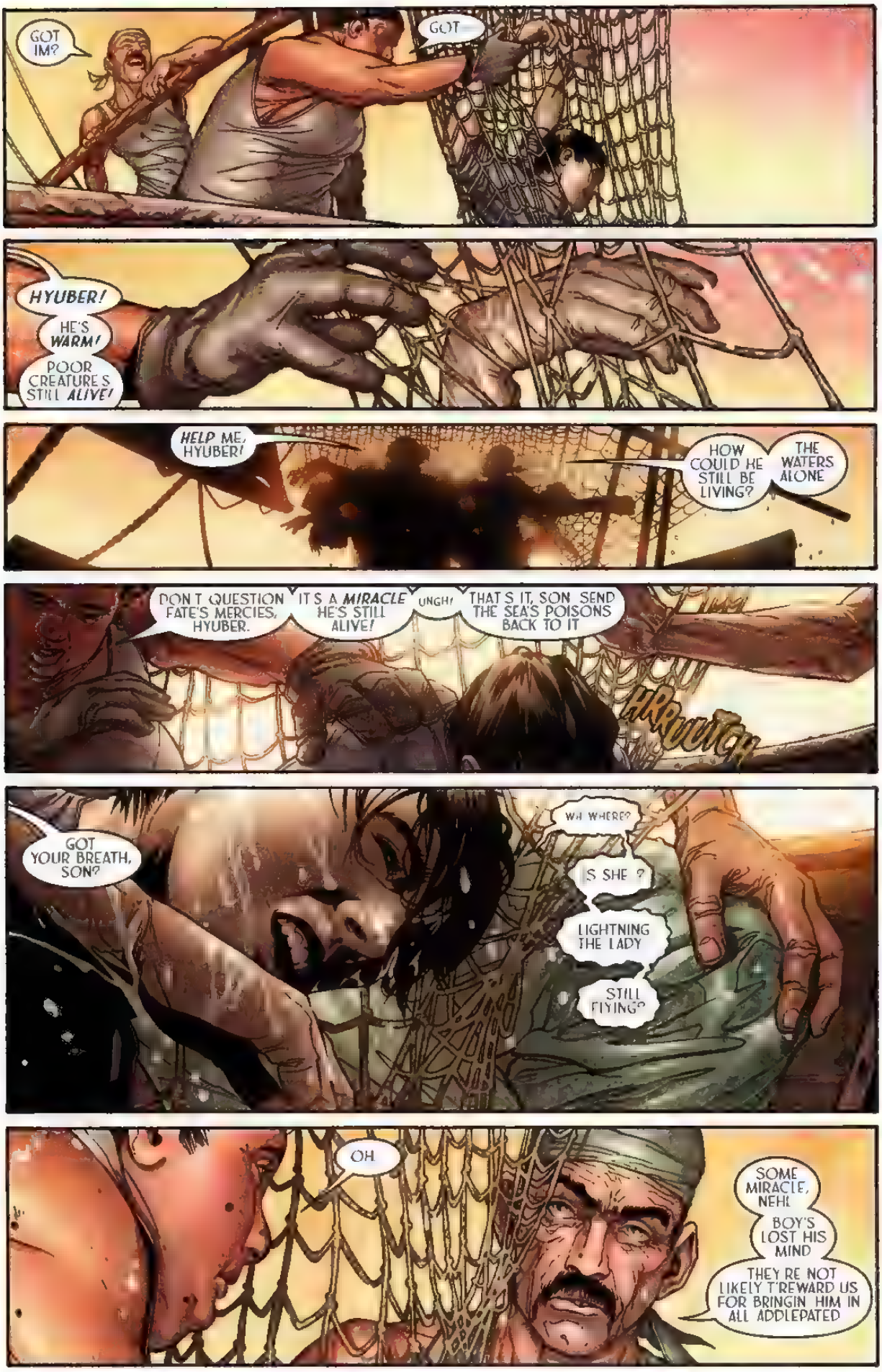
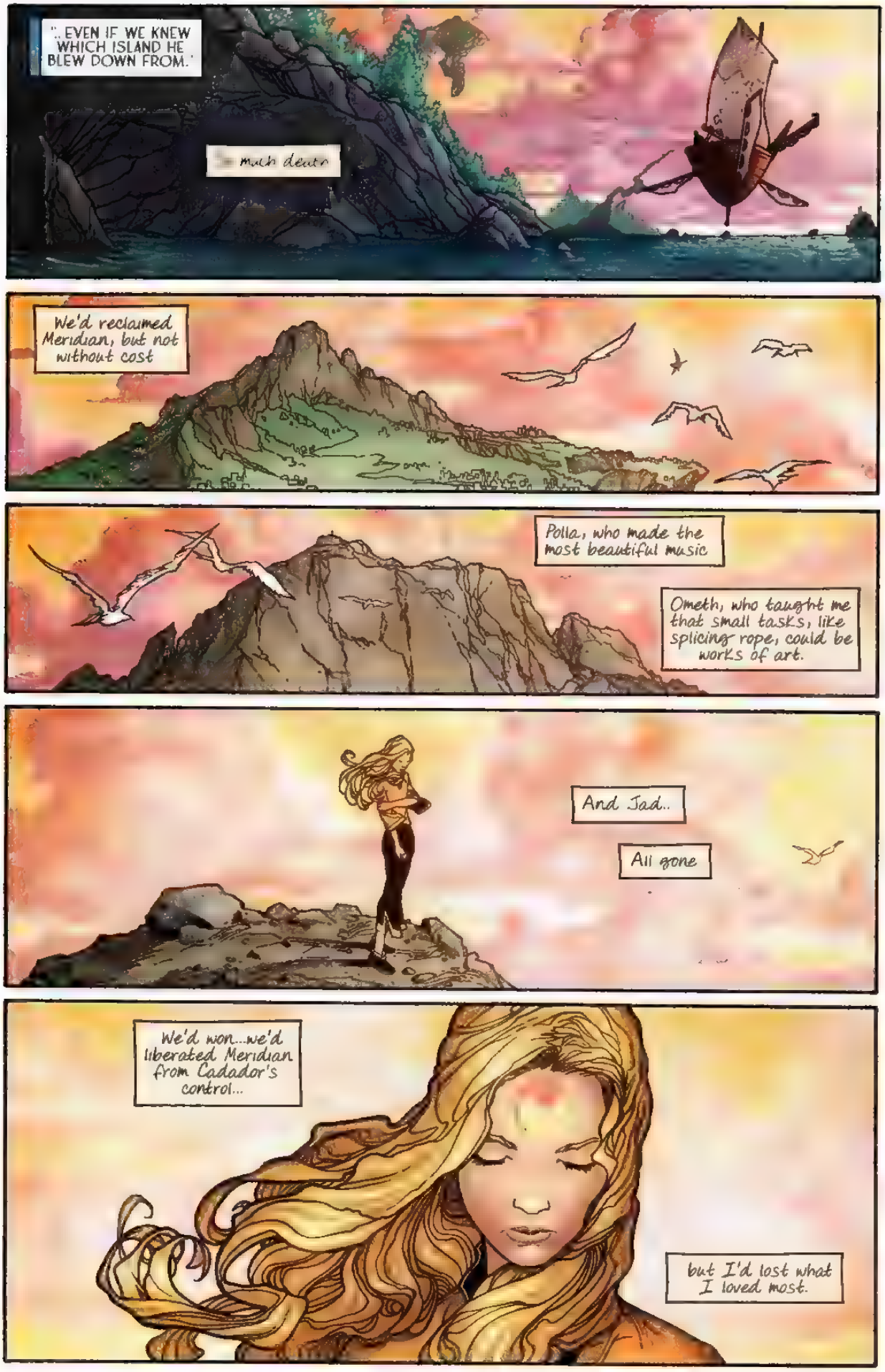
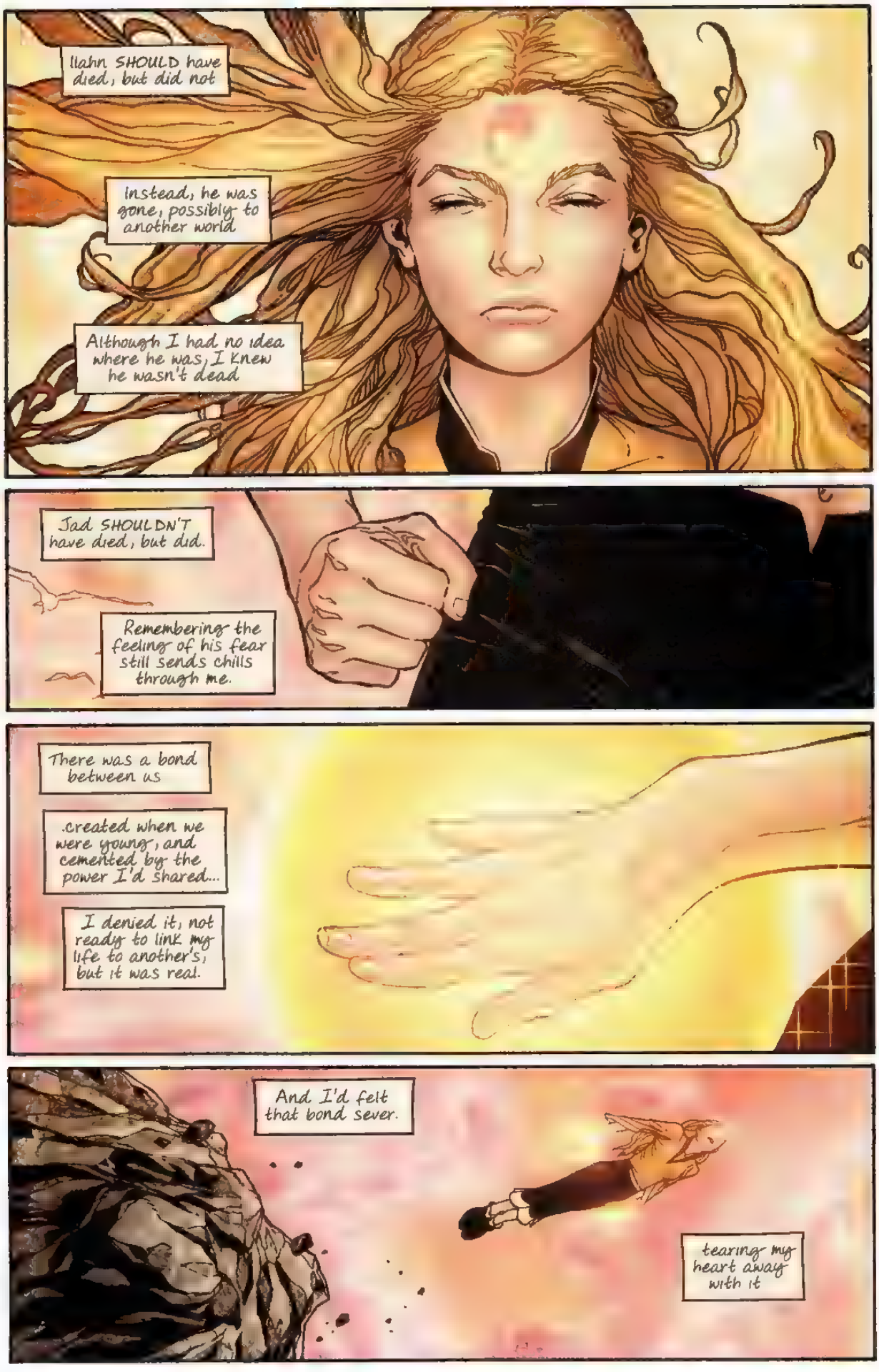
HYUBER!
WE'VE GOT A FLOATER!
HNNH?
NOTHER ONE?
SO IT IS
YOU'RE GOIN T'WANT TO FISH IT OUT, AREN'T YA, NEHL?
IT'S BETTER LUCK THAN WE'VE BEEN HAVING!
IF THE BAD ZONE KEEPS GROWING, FALLEN ISLANDERS MAY SOON BE THE ONLY CATCH WE BRING UP OUT OF THESE WATERS!
IT'S SURELY A LIFESAVER THAT THE SKY FOLK PAY SUCH FINE REWARDS FOR THE RETURN OF THEIR DEAD
THIS ONE APPEARS T'BE NEITHER OLD AND BLIND NOR A SIMPLE CHILD...

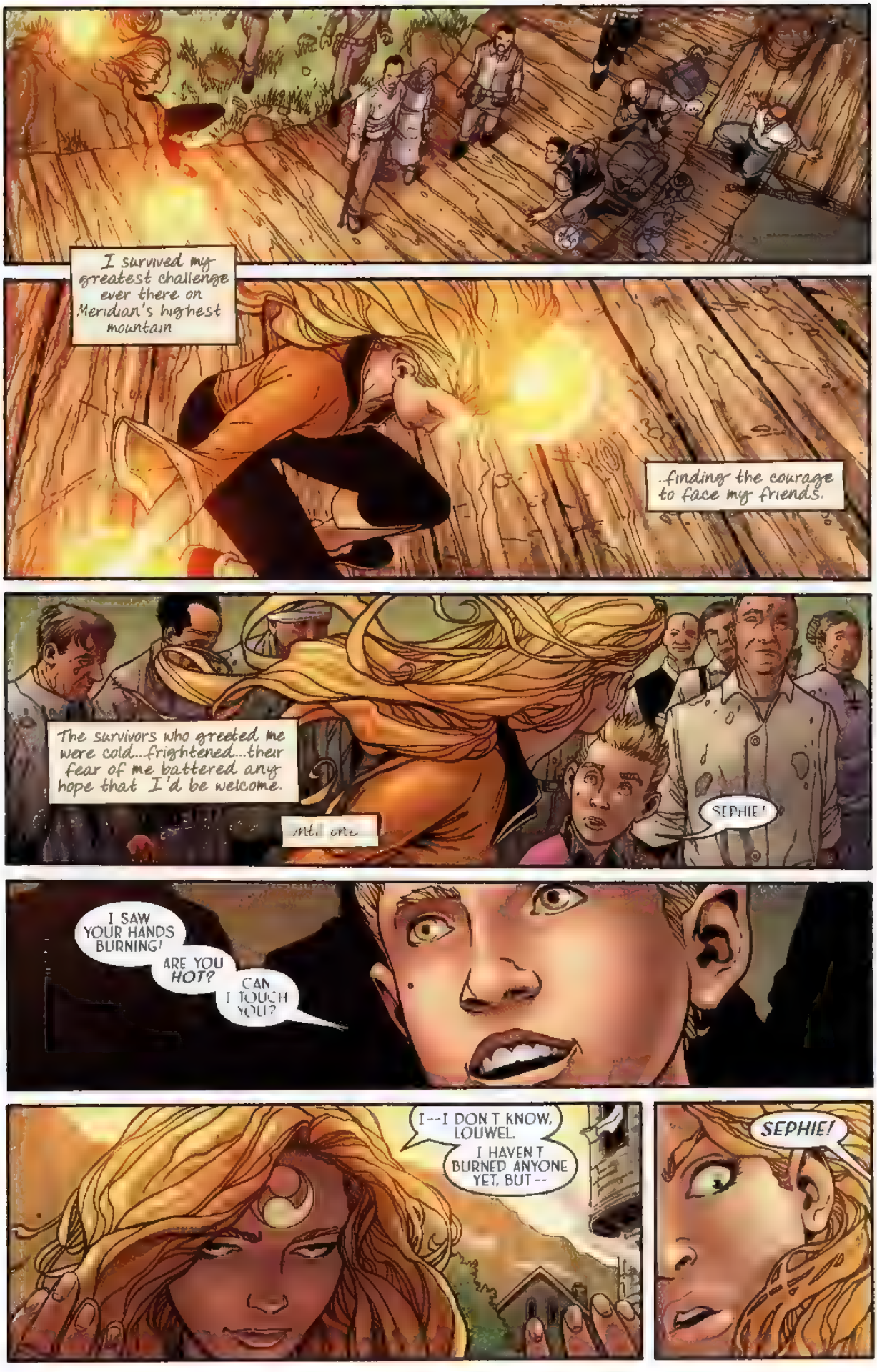
WONDER WHAT MADE HIM FALL?

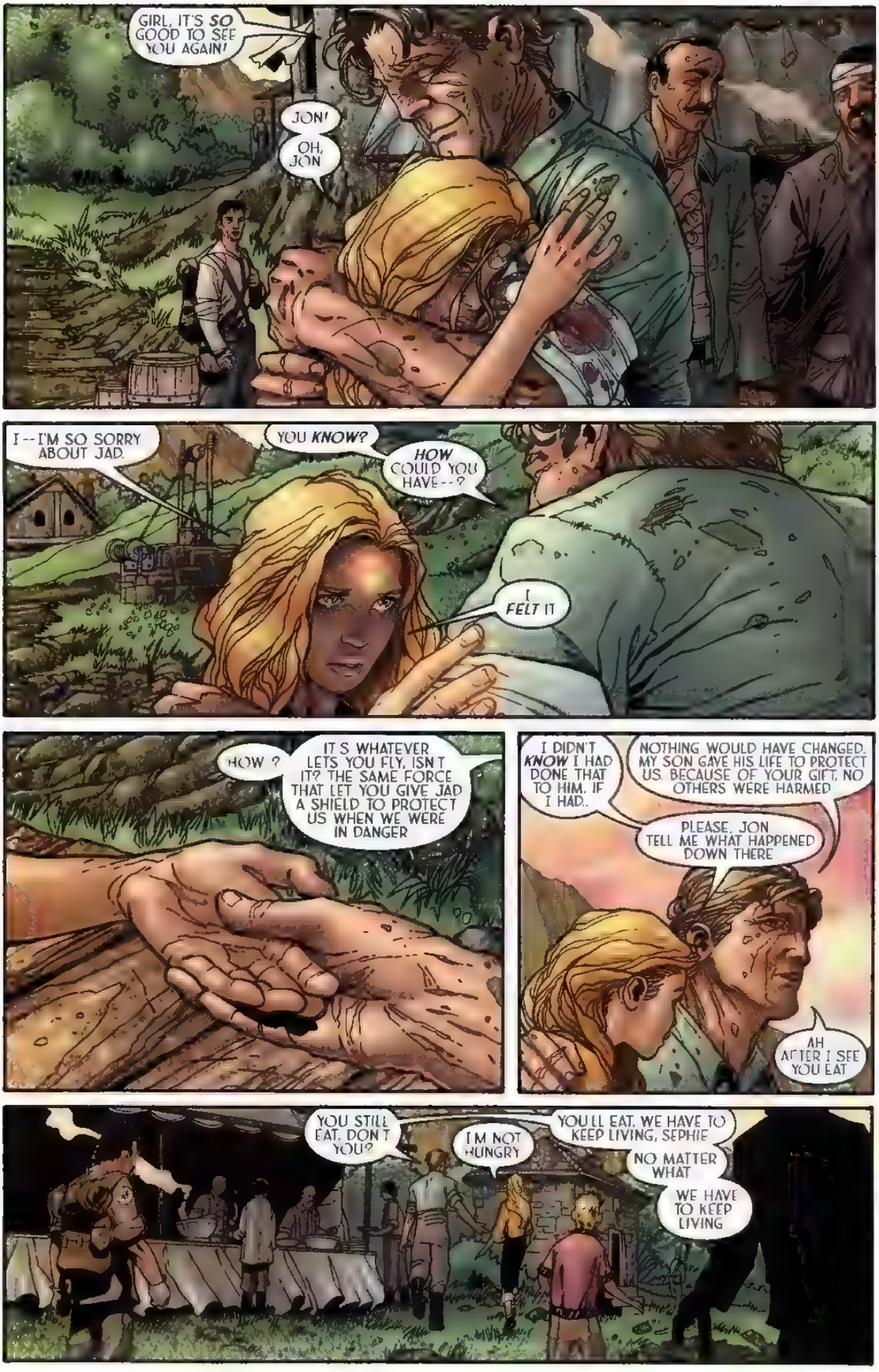

GOT 'IM?
GOT—
HYUBER!
HE'S WARM!
POOR CREATURE'S STILL ALIVE!
HELP ME, HYUBER!
HOW COULD HE STILL BE LIVING?
THE WATERS ALONE
DON'T QUESTION FATE'S MERCIES, HYUBER.
IT'S A MIRACLE HE'S STILL ALIVE!
UNGH!
THAT'S IT, SON. SEND THE SEA'S POISONS BACK TO IT
HRRUUGH
GOT YOUR BREATH, SON?
WH WHERE?
S SHE ?
LIGHTNING THE LADY
STILL FLYING?
OH
SOME MIRACLE, NEH!
BOY'S LOST HIS MIND
THEY'RE NOT LIKELY T'REWARD US FOR BRINGIN' HIM IN ALL ADDLEPATED


"..EVEN IF WE KNEW WHICH ISLAND HE BLEW DOWN FROM."
much deatr
We'd reclaimed Meridian, but not without cost
Polla, who made the most beautiful music
Ometh, who taught me that small tasks, like splicing rope, could be works of art.
And Jad..
All gone
We'd won...we'd liberated Meridian from Cadador's control...
but I'd lost what I loved most.


Ilahn SHOULD have died, but did not
Instead, he was gone, possibly to another world
Although I had no idea where he was, I knew he wasn't dead
Jad SHOULDN'T have died, but did.
Remembering the feeling of his fear still sends chills through me.
There was a bond between us
.created when we were young, and cemented by the power I'd shared...
I denied it, not ready to link my life to another's, but it was real.
And I'd felt that bond sever.
tearing my heart away with it

UHP!
SHE'S COMING!
SHE'S COMING!
All I'd gotten were impressions...
Jad brave but frightened, using a power like mine to protect the others against something--
Someone?
--similarly powerful before
before
A-HEY, EVERYBODY!
HERE COMES SEPHIE!
CAREFUL, LOUWEL MIND THE EDGE
Jon was there He'd seen his son die.
I had to choose Meridian I had to let Jad die
Even though I was sure he'd understand..
how could Jon ever forgive me?

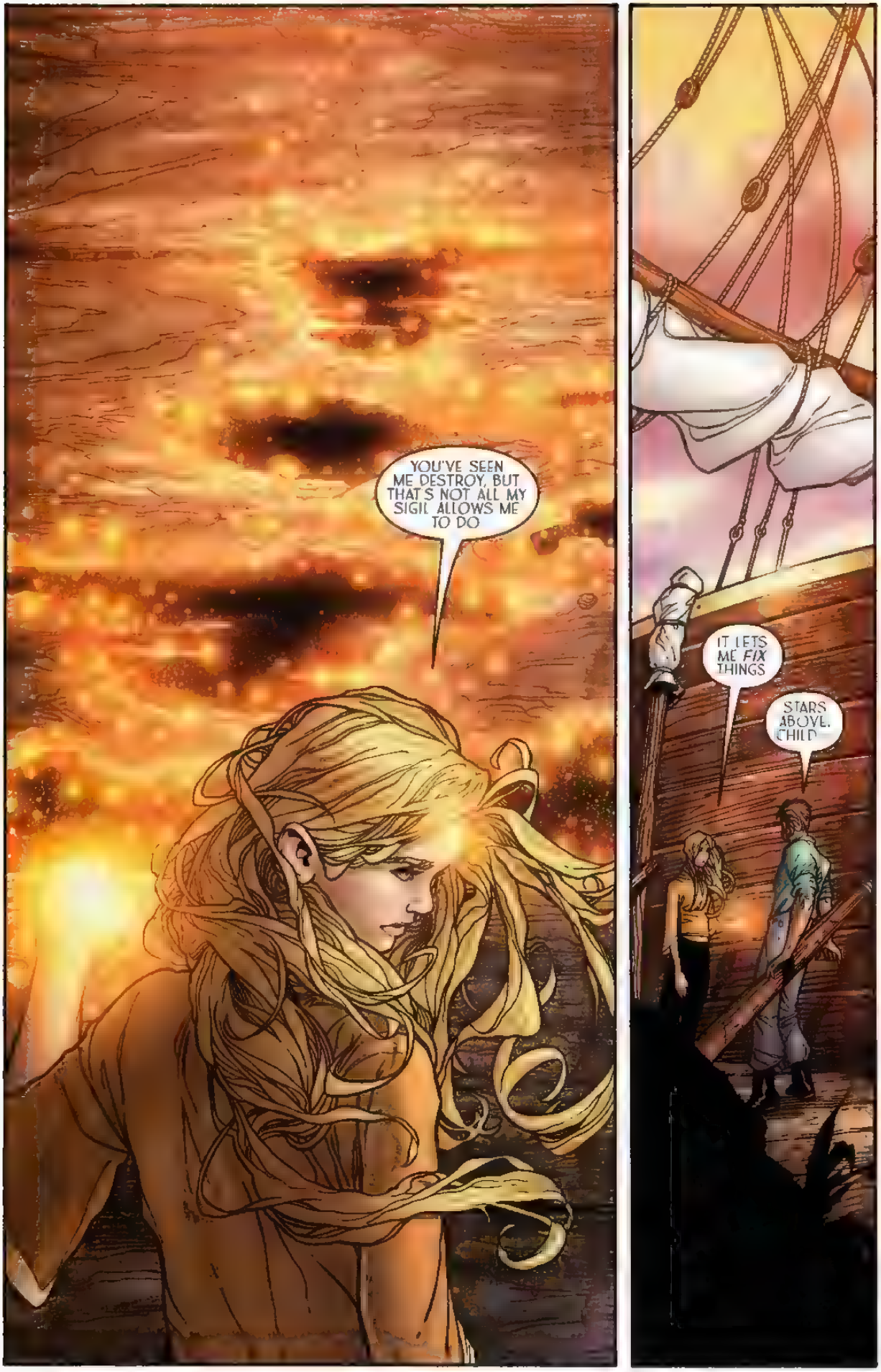

I survived my greatest challenge ever there on Meridian's highest mountain
...finding the courage to face my friends.
The survivors who greeted me were cold...frightened...their fear of me battered any hope that I'd be welcome.
SEPHIE!
I SAW YOUR HANDS BURNING!
ARE YOU HOT?
CAN I TOUCH YOU?
I--I DON'T KNOW, LOUWEL.
I HAVEN'T BURNED ANYONE YET, BUT--
SEPHIE!


GIRL, IT'S SO GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN!
JON!
OH, JON
I--I'M SO SORRY ABOUT JAD.
YOU KNOW?
HOW COULD YOU HAVE--?
I FELT IT
HOW ?
IT'S WHATEVER LETS YOU FLY, ISN'T IT? THE SAME FORCE THAT LET YOU GIVE JAD A SHIELD TO PROTECT US WHEN WE WERE IN DANGER
I DIDN'T KNOW I HAD DONE THAT TO HIM. IF I HAD..
NOTHING WOULD HAVE CHANGED. MY SON GAVE HIS LIFE TO PROTECT US. BECAUSE OF YOUR GIFT, NO OTHERS WERE HARMED
PLEASE, JON TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED DOWN THERE
AH AFTER I SEE YOU EAT
YOU STILL EAT, DON'T YOU?
I'M NOT HUNGRY
YOU'LL EAT. WE HAVE TO KEEP LIVING, SEPHIE
NO MATTER WHAT
WE HAVE TO KEEP LIVING

WE'LL MOURN MY BOY, AND I'LL ALWAYS REGRET THAT YOU TWO -
WE'LL MOVE ON, SEPHIE.
WE'LL TEND TO WHAT'S NEEDED MOST, TAKE THE TIME TO REMEMBER WHAT'S LOST AFTER LIFE HAS CALMED A LITTLE.
WHAT YOU'VE GOT TO DO NOW IS STEP IN AND RECLAIM THE MINISTRY.
THINGS NEED TO BE PUT RIGHT AFTER CADADOR'S --
SEPHIE!
WHOOOp!
YOU DID IT, LITTLE GIRL!
YOU MET THE MENACE AND STOMPED HIM INTO DUST!
AND YOU WERE AFRAID HE WAS THE STRONGER ONE!
I KNEW YOU'D TRIUMPH. ONCE YOU LET YOURSELF
I TAKE IT THESE ARE FRIENDS OF YOURS?

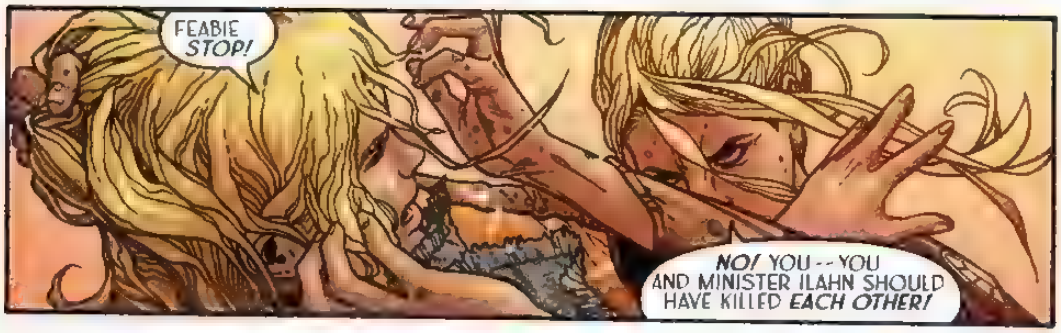
JON TAKARTY, THIS IS WIL COTSON FROM THE LOGGERS CAMP
MERIDIAN'S WELL FAMILIAR WITH YOUR WORK DOWN THERE
WE'RE A PRETTY FAMILIAR KIND OF BUNCH DOWN THERE
DEREN BEQ, WHO RUNS THE LAIR DOWN IN THE CAVERNS CITY
SO YOU'RE WHO TOOK OVER FROM OLD NICHOLAS!
I REMEMBER YOU. YOU USED TO COME WITH TUROS AND IDERIA!
YOU, YOU'RE LITTLE DERRY-BERRY, AREN'T YOU?
DERRY-BERRY ?
AND THIS IS CRENNER, GRANDSON OF MINISTER GERES OF --
YOU DO KNOW, DON'T YOU, JON?
ABOUT THE SECRET CITY OF ANHEIM?
OH, YES SO YOU'VE MET CRENNER
MINISTER GERES SENDS HIS REGARDS
MUCH MORE THAN I'D HOPED THANKS TO SEPHIE
AND CRENNER, YOU'RE ALL GROWN UP. HOW TIME FLIES ANY SUCCESS?
YOUR SON'S BEEN FIGHTING BY OUR SIDE. I HAVEN'T SEEN HIM YET TODAY WASN'T HE COMING WITH YOU?
MY SON IS DEAD. HE DIED DEFENDING US FROM ILAHN'S AGENT
I'M SORRY JON
JAD TAKARTY WAS A GOOD MAN

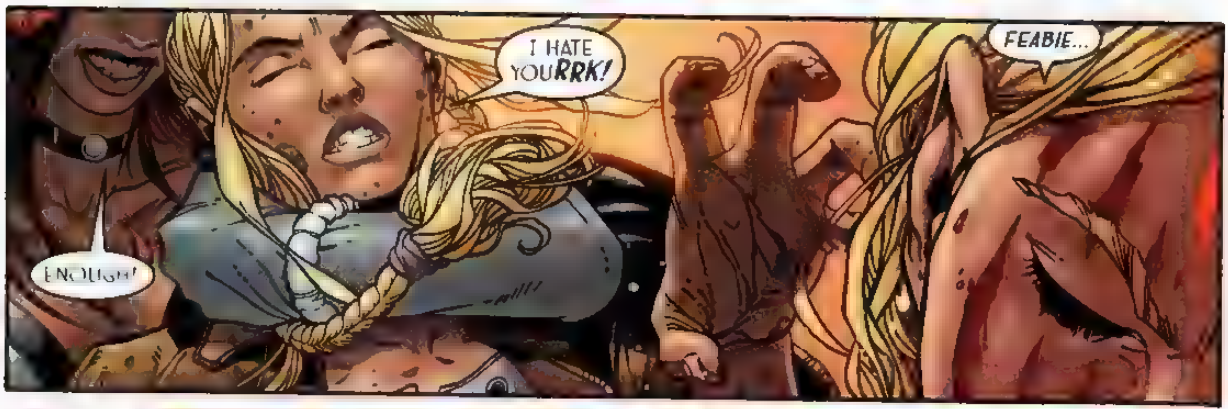
EXCUSE ME NOW I M NEEDED UP AT THE DOCK
CONSIDERING HOW YOU RODE THAT POOR KID I M PROUD OF WHAT YOU SAID TO HIS FATHER DIDN T THINK YOU HAD IT IN YOU
I DIDN T WANT JAD DEAD T JUST WORKS OUT BETTER FOR ALL OF US IF SOMEBODY ELSE IS AT THE CENTER OF SEPHIE S LIFE
JON?
FORGIVE ME, SEPHIE, BUT I CAN T TALK AFFAIRS OF STATE RIGHT NOW
JUST LET ME SHOW YOU SOMETHING
WATCH

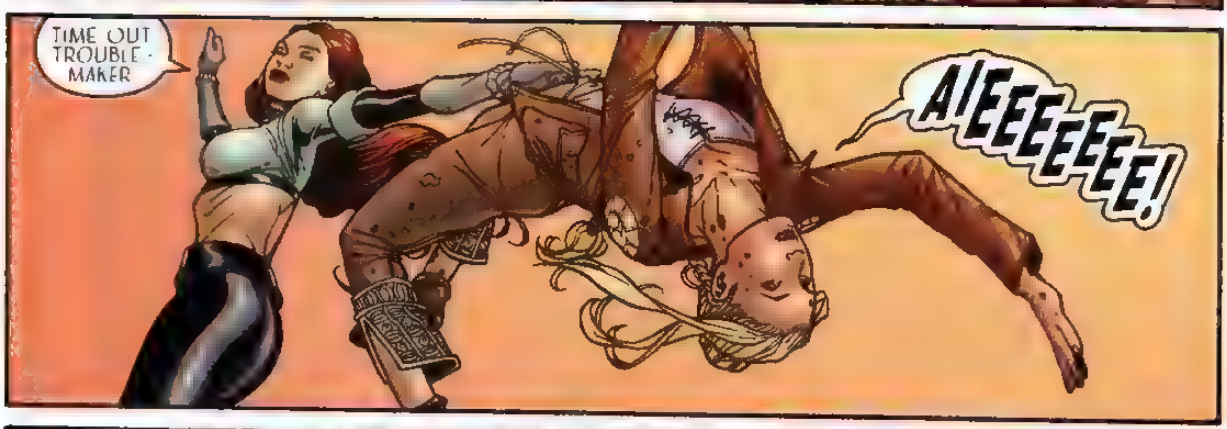

YOU'VE SEEN ME DESTROY, BUT THAT'S NOT ALL MY SIGIL ALLOWS ME TO DO
IT LETS ME *FIX* THINGS
STARS ABOVE, CHILD

THAT IS TRULY AMAZING
SEPHIE!
SEPHIE!
THIS HULL LOOKS AS GOOD AS NEW!
OH, I'M SO GLAD YOU'RE HOME!
DID YOU HEAR ABOUT JAD?
YES, I -- I HEARD
I'M SO SORRY ABOUT THAT I HAD TO --
BONNNK
YOU LIAR!
FEABIE!
YOU'RE SO SORRY!
YOU LET HIM BE KILLED!
YOU COULD HAVE SAVED HIM!
YOU DIDN'T WANT HIM, DID YOU? YOU WANTED THAT NEW BOY!
YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO LET JAD DIE, SEPHIE --
BUT YOU DID!

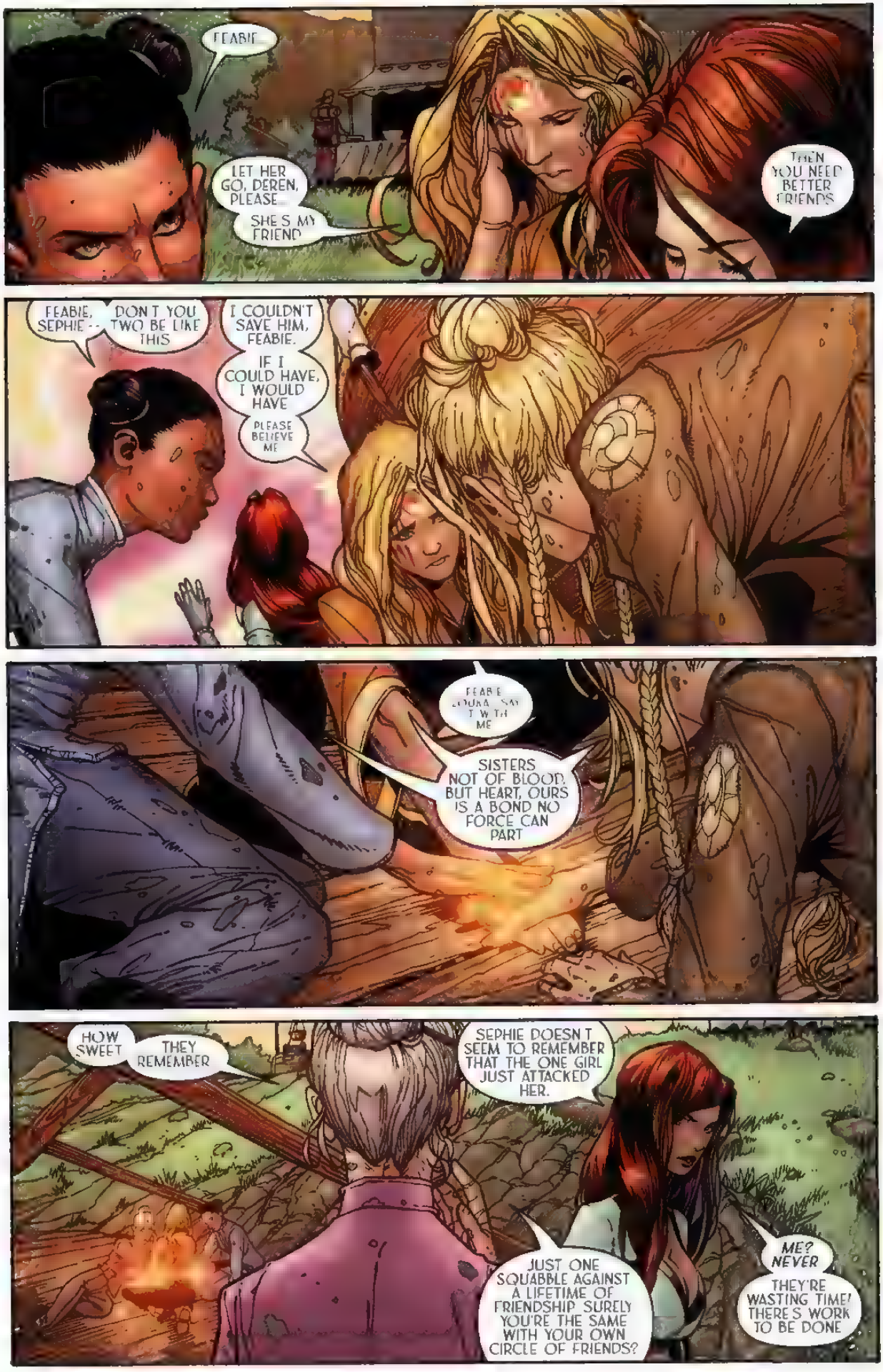
FEABIE
YOU MONSTER!
HOW MANY MORE OF US WILL YOU GET KILLED?


FEABIE STOP!
NO! YOU -- YOU AND MINISTER ILAHN SHOULD HAVE KILLED EACH OTHER!


I HATE YOURRK!
FEABIE...
ENOUGH!

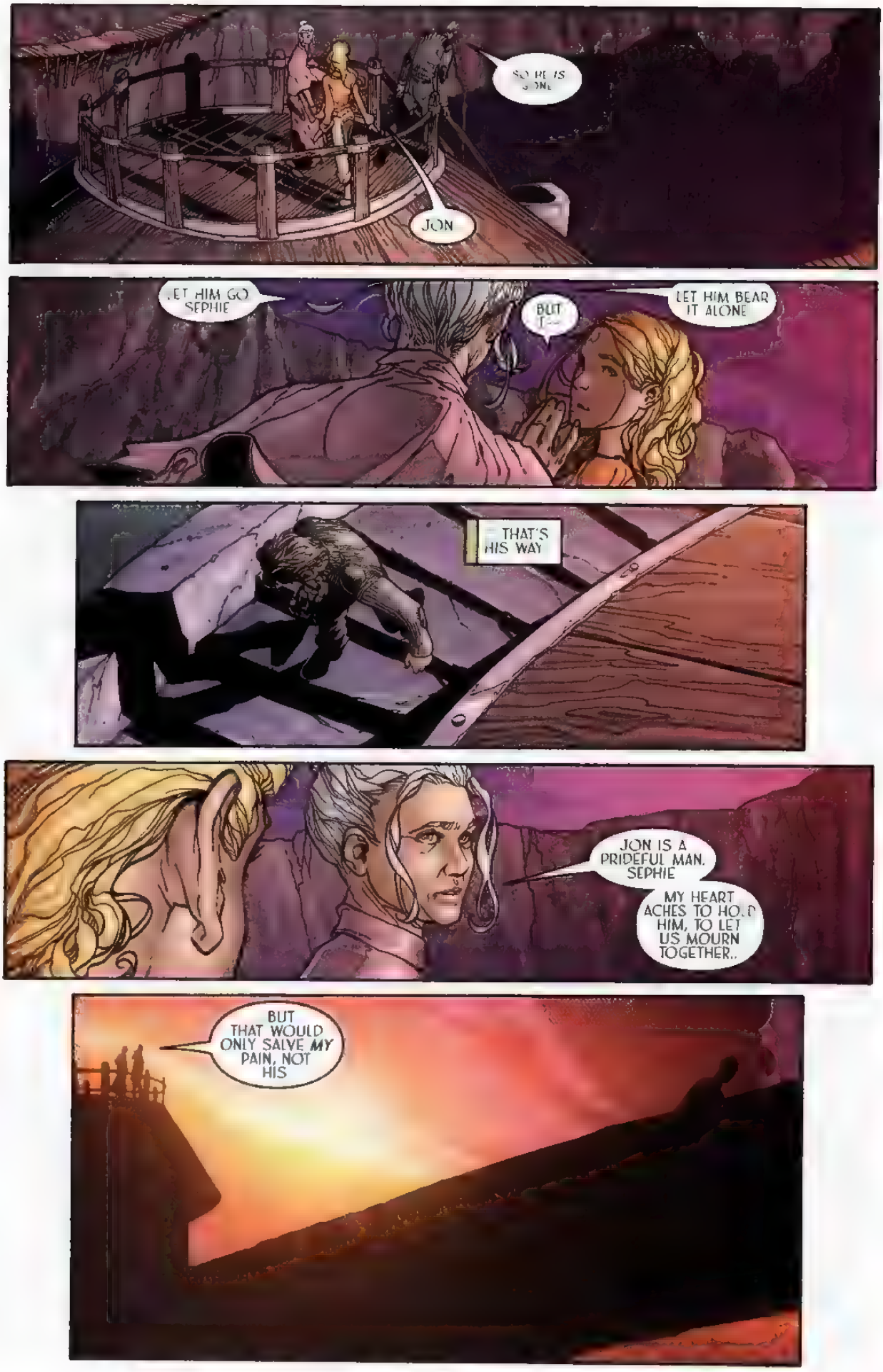

TIME OUT TROUBLE-MAKER
AIEEEEEEE!

GO AHEAD -- HOWL IT OUT
SCREAM IT ALL AWAY, BUT I WON'T LET YOU HURT ANYONE WHILE YOU DO
WE'RE ALL TOO HURT ALREADY
NOOOOO!

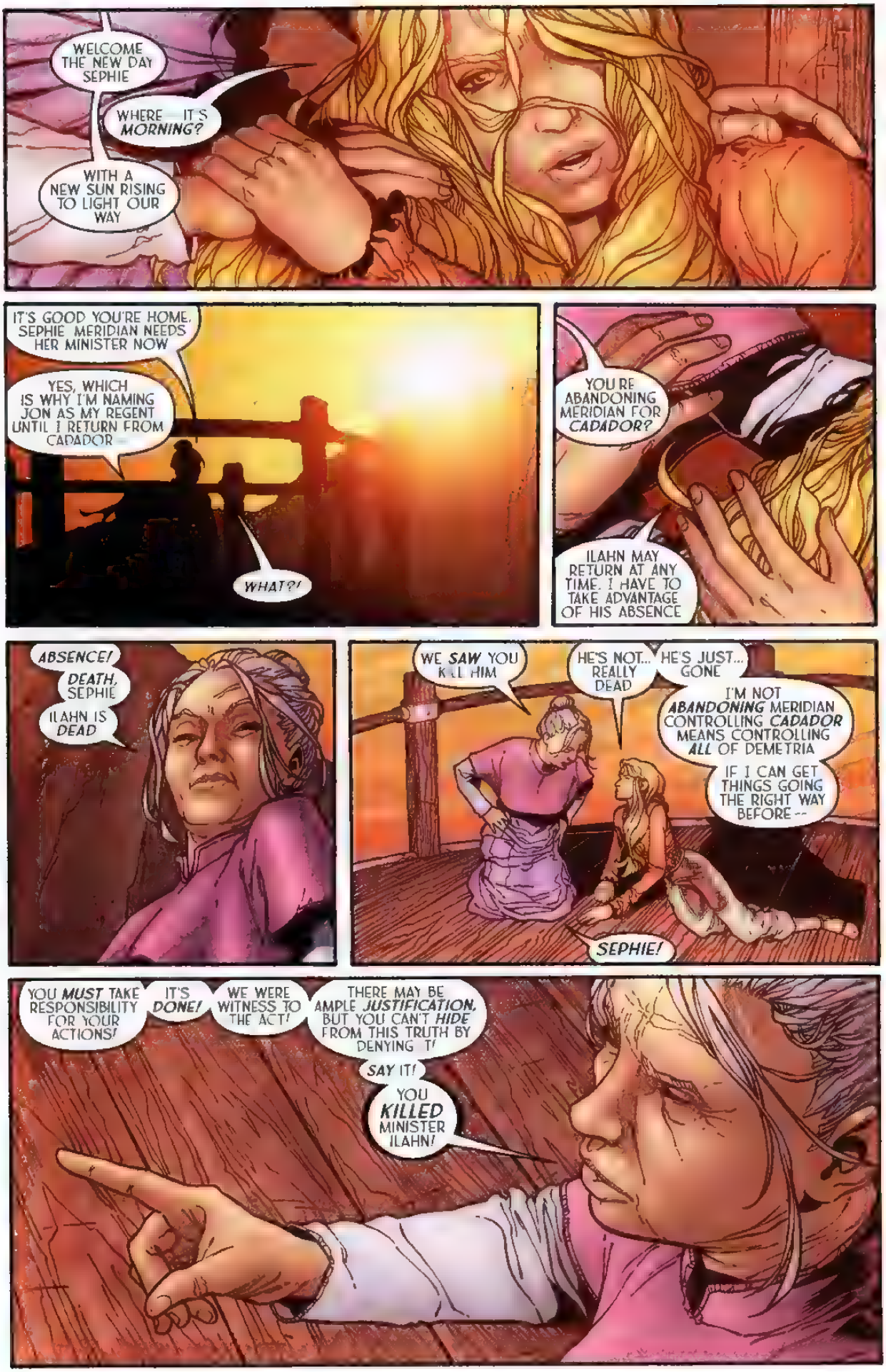

FEABIE...
LET HER GO, DEREN, PLEASE...
SHE'S MY FRIEND
THEN YOU NEED BETTER FRIENDS
FEABIE, SEPHIE--
DON'T YOU TWO BE LIKE THIS
I COULDN'T SAVE HIM, FEABIE.
IF I COULD HAVE, I WOULD HAVE
PLEASE BELIEVE ME
SISTERS NOT OF BLOOD, BUT HEART, OURS IS A BOND NO FORCE CAN PART
HOW SWEET
THEY REMEMBER
SEPHIE DOESN'T SEEM TO REMEMBER THAT THE ONE GIRL JUST ATTACKED HER.
JUST ONE SQUABBLE AGAINST A LIFETIME OF FRIENDSHIP. SURELY YOU'RE THE SAME WITH YOUR OWN CIRCLE OF FRIENDS?
ME? NEVER
THEY'RE WASTING TIME! THERE'S WORK TO BE DONE

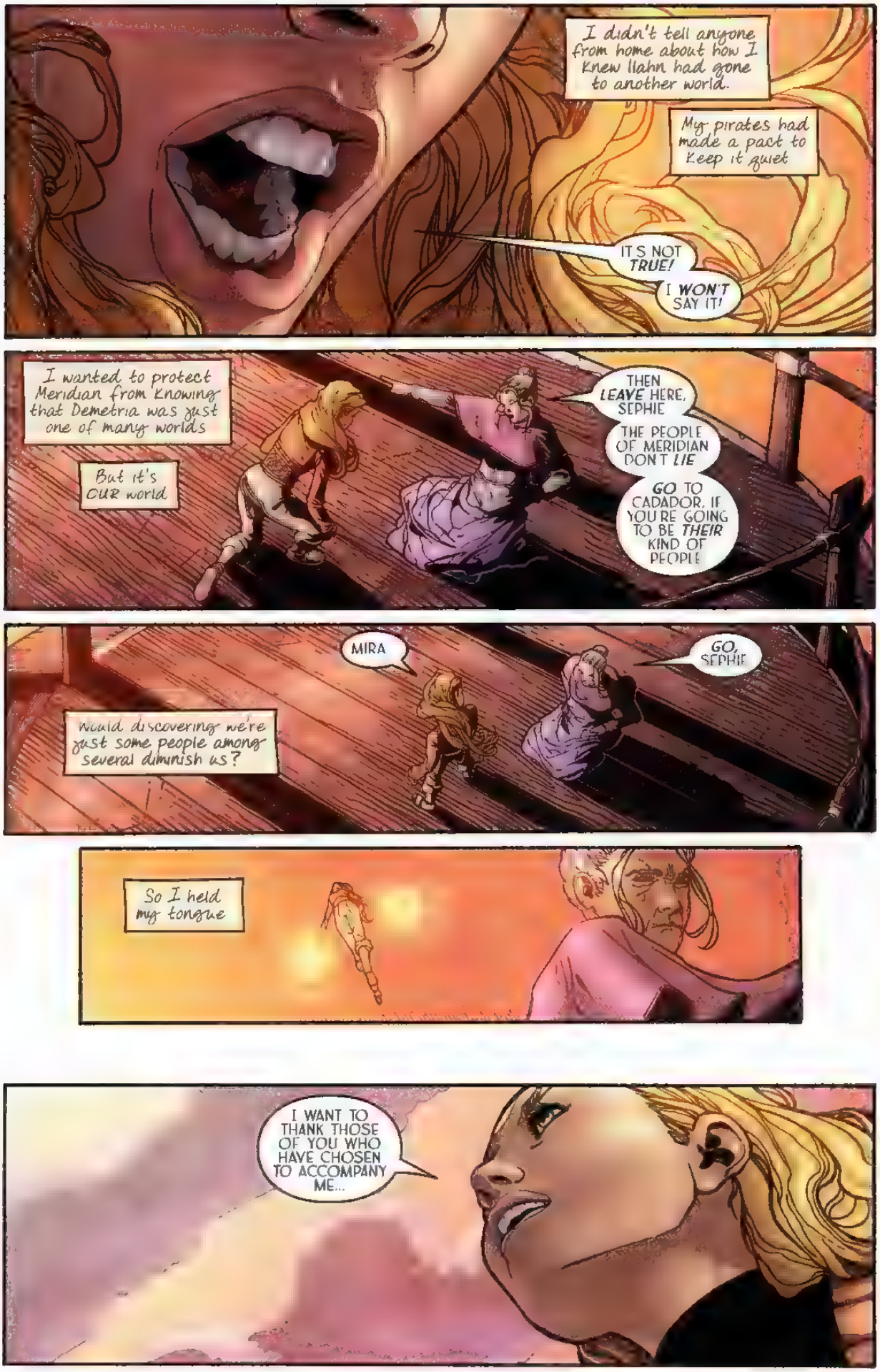
When someone dies, your first feeling is dull surprise--
That COULDN'T have happened!
HOW could THAT have happened?
This is followed by a wave of emotion so powerful it steals your breath and buckles your knees --
No! Not to HIM! It couldn't have happened to HIM!
Next comes peace, when the body is so worn out by its own reaction that it cannot find the energy to grieve further
without rest

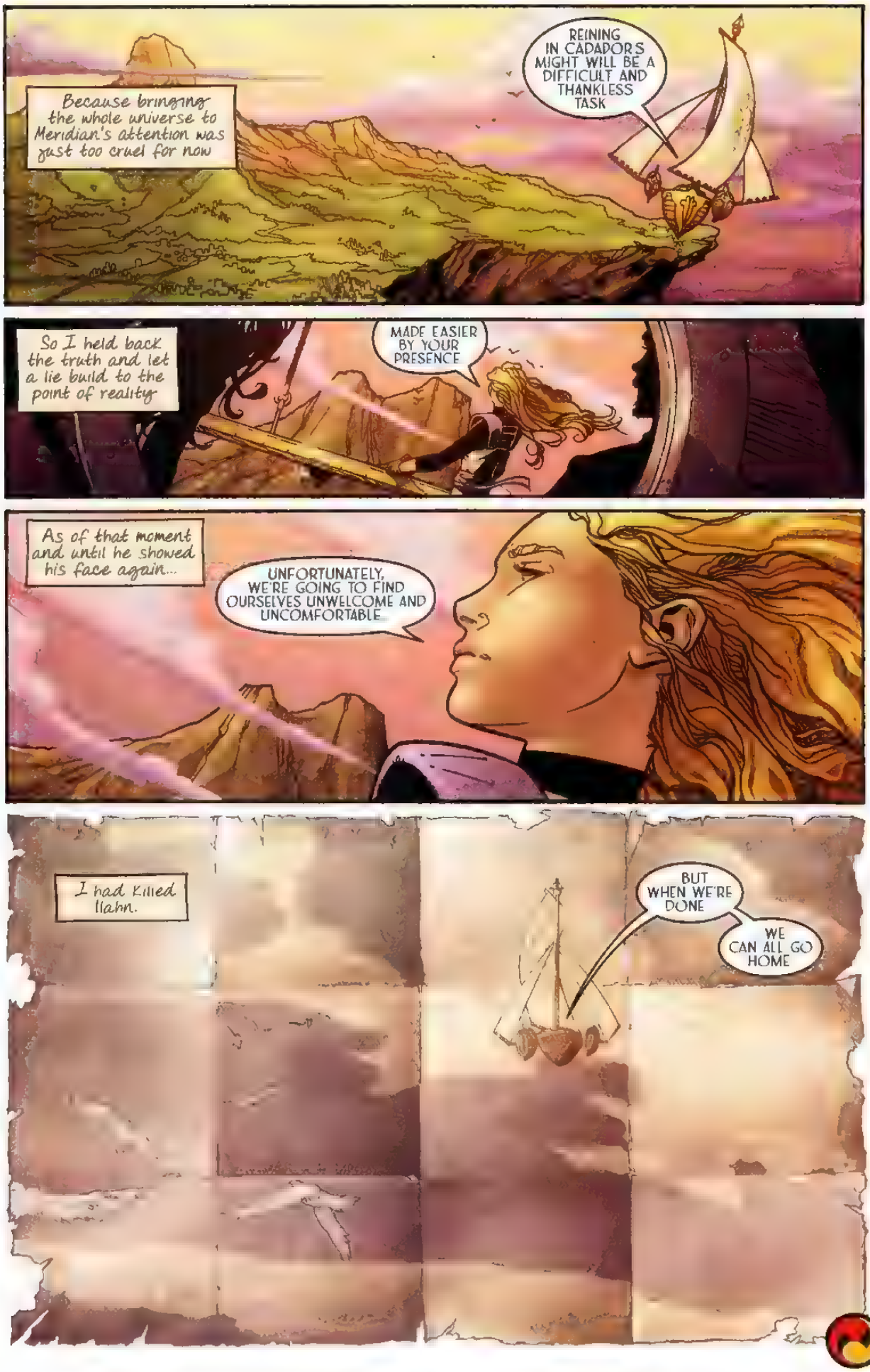
Once you reach that state...
...it is good to have something to do.
Work is the greatest antidote for pain
Even if it can't make the hurting stop
NO
THIS WAS ALL I COULD FIND


SO HE IS GONE
JON
LET HIM GO SEPHIE
BUT I—
LET HIM BEAR IT ALONE
THAT'S HIS WAY
JON IS A PRIDEFUL MAN, SEPHIE
MY HEART ACHES TO HOLD HIM, TO LET US MOURN TOGETHER..
BUT THAT WOULD ONLY SALVE *MY* PAIN, NOT HIS

I REALLY SHOULD GO TO HIM, MIRA!
HE REALLY SHOULDN'T BE ALONE RIGHT NOW
HE SHOULDN'T
HAVE TO
HNNH
I SHOULD
HNNH
JAD IS
HNNH
OH, SEPHIE
THERE'S NO SHOULD.
JAD'S TRAGEDY IS AS MUCH OURS AS JON'S
WE ALL LOVED THE BOY
YOU'VE DONE ALL YOU NEED DO TODAY
EXCEPT CRY FOR HIM


WELCOME THE NEW DAY SEPHIE
WHERE — IT'S *MORNING?*
WITH A NEW SUN RISING TO LIGHT OUR WAY
IT'S GOOD YOU'RE HOME, SEPHIE. MERIDIAN NEEDS HER MINISTER NOW
YES, WHICH IS WHY I'M NAMING JON AS MY REGENT UNTIL I RETURN FROM CADADOR —
WHAT?!
YOU'RE ABANDONING MERIDIAN FOR *CADADOR?*
ILAHN MAY RETURN AT ANY TIME. I HAVE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF HIS ABSENCE
ABSENCE!
DEATH, SEPHIE
ILAHN IS *DEAD*
WE *SAW* YOU KILL HIM
HE'S NOT... REALLY DEAD
HE'S JUST... GONE
I'M NOT *ABANDONING* MERIDIAN CONTROLLING *CADADOR* MEANS CONTROLLING *ALL* OF DEMETRIA
IF I CAN GET THINGS GOING THE RIGHT WAY BEFORE --
SEPHIE!
YOU *MUST* TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR ACTIONS!
IT'S *DONE!*
WE WERE WITNESS TO THE ACT!
THERE MAY BE AMPLE *JUSTIFICATION,* BUT YOU CAN'T *HIDE* FROM THIS TRUTH BY DENYING IT!
SAY IT!
YOU *KILLED* MINISTER ILAHN!


I didn't tell anyone from home about how I knew Ilahn had gone to another world.
My pirates had made a pact to keep it quiet
IT'S NOT TRUE!
I WON'T SAY IT!
I wanted to protect Meridian from knowing that Demetria was just one of many worlds
But it's OUR world
THEN LEAVE HERE, SEPHIE
THE PEOPLE OF MERIDIAN DON'T LIE
GO TO CADADOR. IF YOU'RE GOING TO BE THEIR KIND OF PEOPLE
MIRA
GO, SEPHIE
Would discovering we're just some people among several diminish us?
So I held my tongue
I WANT TO THANK THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE CHOSEN TO ACCOMPANY ME...


Because bringing the whole universe to Meridian's attention was just too cruel for now
REINING IN CADADORS MIGHT WILL BE A DIFFICULT AND THANKLESS TASK
So I held back the truth and let a lie build to the point of reality
MADE EASIER BY YOUR PRESENCE
As of that moment and until he showed his face again...
UNFORTUNATELY, WE'RE GOING TO FIND OURSELVES UNWELCOME AND UNCOMFORTABLE
I had killed Ilahn.
BUT WHEN WE'RE DONE
WE CAN ALL GO HOME

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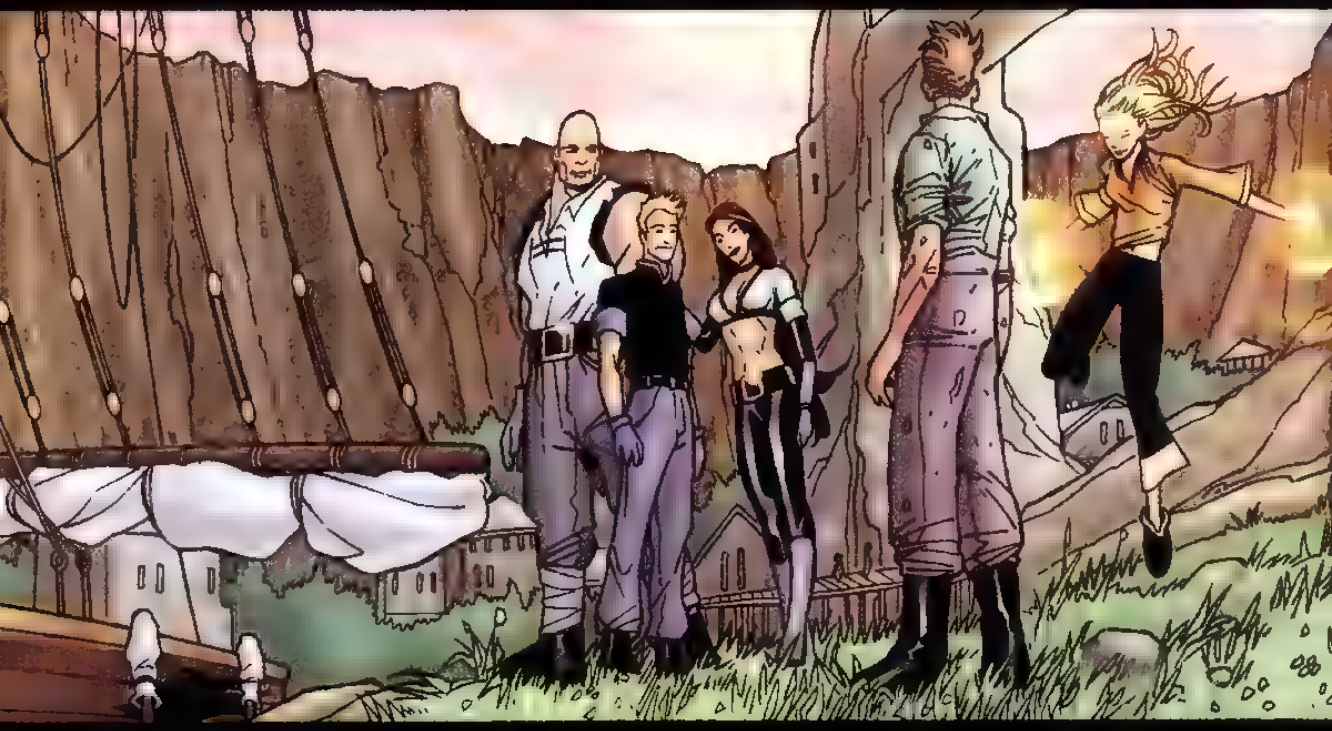
CGE
MERIDIAN
Brigman Geraci MO!

Far away, on the world of Demetria, explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

One of these islands is Meridian, home of shipbuilders and Sephie, the daughter of Minister Turos. Sephie has become the Minister of Meridian after her father's death. Her uncle Ilahn is the Minister of the rich city-state of Cadador, which controls most of the shipping and trade on Demetria.

A mysterious force has endowed both Sephie and Ilahn with power — opposing forces — Ilahn's destruction versus Sephie's renewal.

Ilahn wants to control Sephie — and Meridian — but Sephie has been fighting to resist Ilahn's control of herself and Demetria's commerce. The conflict between them erupts into a battle, during which Ilahn disappears...apparently dead at Sephie's hands. Sephie returns to Meridian only to find herself leaving the island again to go to Cadador, which she intends to rule.



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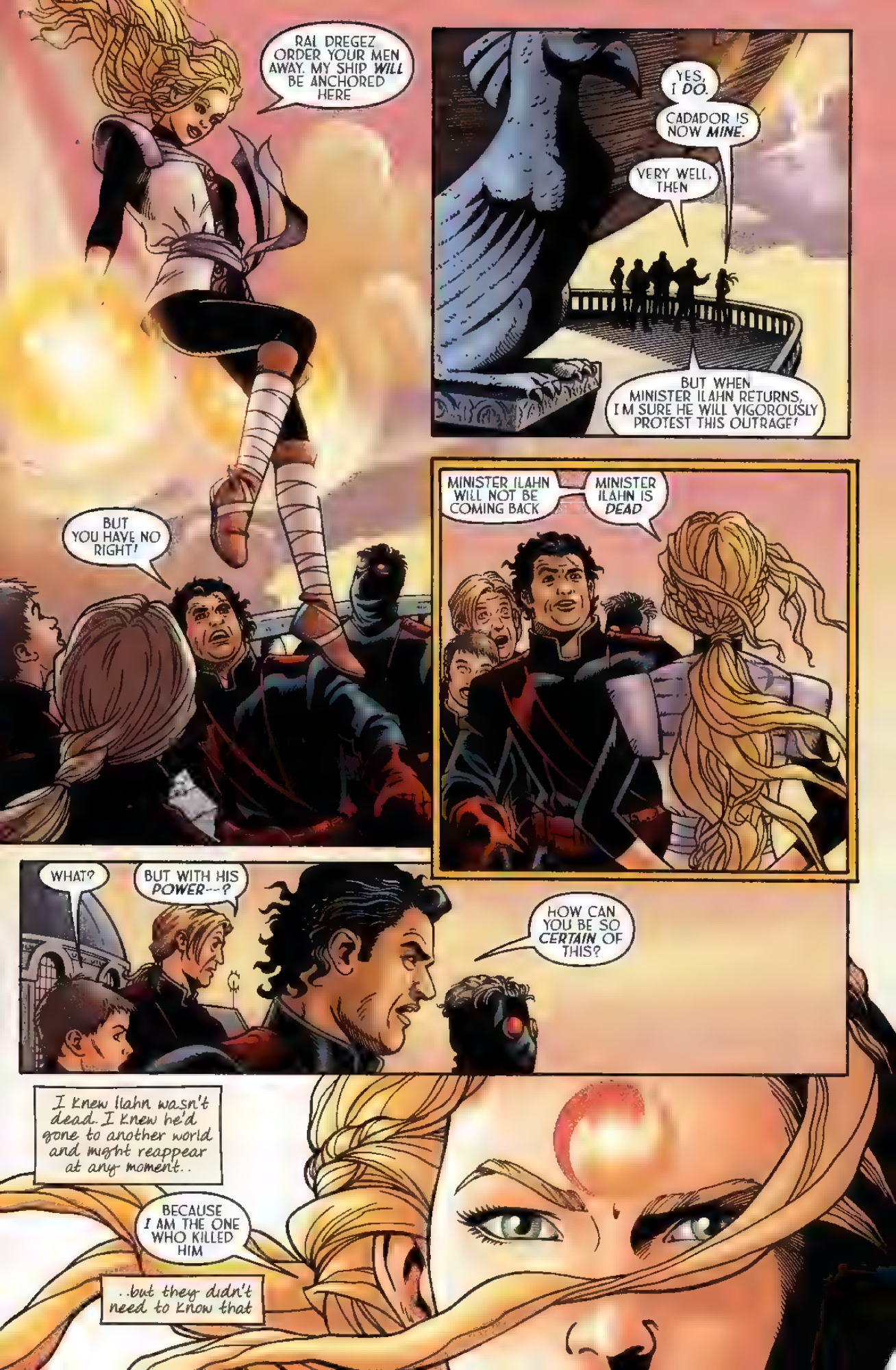
Seeing Cadador again made me shudder.
I didn't want to return to that island, ever, but I'd been provided an opportunity that couldn't be wasted.
So I returned to Cadador..
this time, to rule it.
ISN'T CADADOR'S PORT BELOW THE RIM OF THE ISLAND?
WE'RE NOT ANCHORING IN THE DOCKS -- WE'LL TIE OFF ON THE RAIL AROUND ILAHN'S ESTATE
THIS ENTIRE ISLAND IS... WAS HIS HOME.
BUT MORE PEOPLE WILL SEE YOUR ARRIVAL IF YOU PUT INTO PORT, SEPHIE
YOU REALLY OUGHT TO LET THEM SPREAD THE STORY FOR YOU
MORE PEOPLE WILL HEAR ABOUT IT IF I TAKE THE ESTATE
THE GOSSIP CHAIN FROM ILAHN'S ESTATE IS THE MOST EFFICIENT COMMUNICATION SYSTEM ON CADADOR
Nervous as I was, I knew I was ready for this
Papa had made sure I'd be ready
Did he ever suspect? About Ilahn?
I DO ALWAYS APPRECIATE YOUR ADVICE, DEREN, BUT THIS ISN'T ABOUT SPREADING A RUMOR
THIS IS ABOUT ASSERTING POLITICAL POWER.
CROWD CONTROL IS YOUR SPECIALTY--
STATECRAFT IS MINE.

They say there are two steps to training an eguassa. First, you've got to get its attention.
Not that the people of Cadador are likely to start pulling carts and carriages
.but the principle is the same.
CUT THOSE LINES! YOU CAN'T MOOR HERE!
Those who had met me here knew me only as Ilahn's cowed niece.
They had to learn to see ME as Minister
So I had to get their attention.


RAL DREGEZ ORDER YOUR MEN AWAY. MY SHIP *WILL* BE ANCHORED HERE
BUT YOU HAVE NO RIGHT!
YES, I *DO*.
CADADOR IS NOW *MINE*.
VERY WELL, THEN
BUT WHEN MINISTER ILAHN RETURNS, I'M SURE HE WILL VIGOROUSLY PROTEST THIS OUTRAGE!
MINISTER ILAHN WILL NOT BE COMING BACK
MINISTER ILAHN IS *DEAD*
WHAT?
BUT WITH HIS *POWER*---?
HOW CAN YOU BE SO *CERTAIN* OF THIS?
I knew Ilahn wasn't dead. I knew he'd gone to another world and might reappear at any moment..
BECAUSE I AM THE ONE WHO KILLED HIM
..but they didn't need to know that

The second trick to training an eguassa is to hold its head, staring directly into its eyes...
until it blinks
From then on, you are its master
LOROSI!
GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN!
AAAAH!
I'M SORRY, MINISTER OF MERIDIAN, BUT THE MINISTER OF CADADOR IS NOT AT HOME
YOU WILL HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL HE RETURNS
LOROSI, LET'S HAVE AN UNDERSTANDING
I AM IN CHARGE OF ALL CADADOR, INCLUDING THIS ESTATE
YOU WORK FOR ME NOW
YOU WILL ACCEPT ORDERS FROM ME.
...OR FROM MY ASSOCIATES DEREN BEQ, WIL COTSON, AND CRENNER OF ANHEIM
A-ANHEIM?
I APOLOGIZE FOR ANY DISRUPTION TO YOUR SCHEDULE, BUT THERE'S MUCH WORK TO DO.
AM I CLEAR?
AAAH!
HMPEH!
AS YOU WISH, MISTRESS SEPHIE
AW, HE SNORTED. I THINK HE LIKES YOU, DEREN
THINK AGAIN, BIG GUY. NOT ME
MINISTER SEPHIE

MINISTER OF CADADOR.
OH, NO, LOROSI-- YOU'RE STAYING WITH US.
WE'LL LET SEPHIE EXPLORE A LITTLE ON HER OWN
LET HER GET TO KNOW THE PLACE AGAIN
Cadador holds so many memories...
...from long ago, before I was Minister...
before the sigil
...back when I was happy.
SEPHIE?
OH! I--
I WAS JUST REMEMBERING
GOOD MEMORIES, FROM THE LOOKS OF IT
MOSTLY

Cadador holds memories, but it also holds so many secrets its reputation for deceit and underhanded dealings extends back centuries

WHAT A COLLECTION! DID YOU SPEND MUCH TIME HERE, SEPHIE?

NO. I WASN'T ALLOWED BACK HERE. THIS IS ILAHN'S PRIVATE WING.

ILAHN'S? ITS DESIGN DOESN'T MATCH THE REST OF THE HOUSE

ILAHN WAS BRIEFLY MARRIED. THIS LIBRARY MAY HAVE BEEN CLAIRESSA'S

WHAT'S THIS? CRENNER. IT LOOKS LIKE...

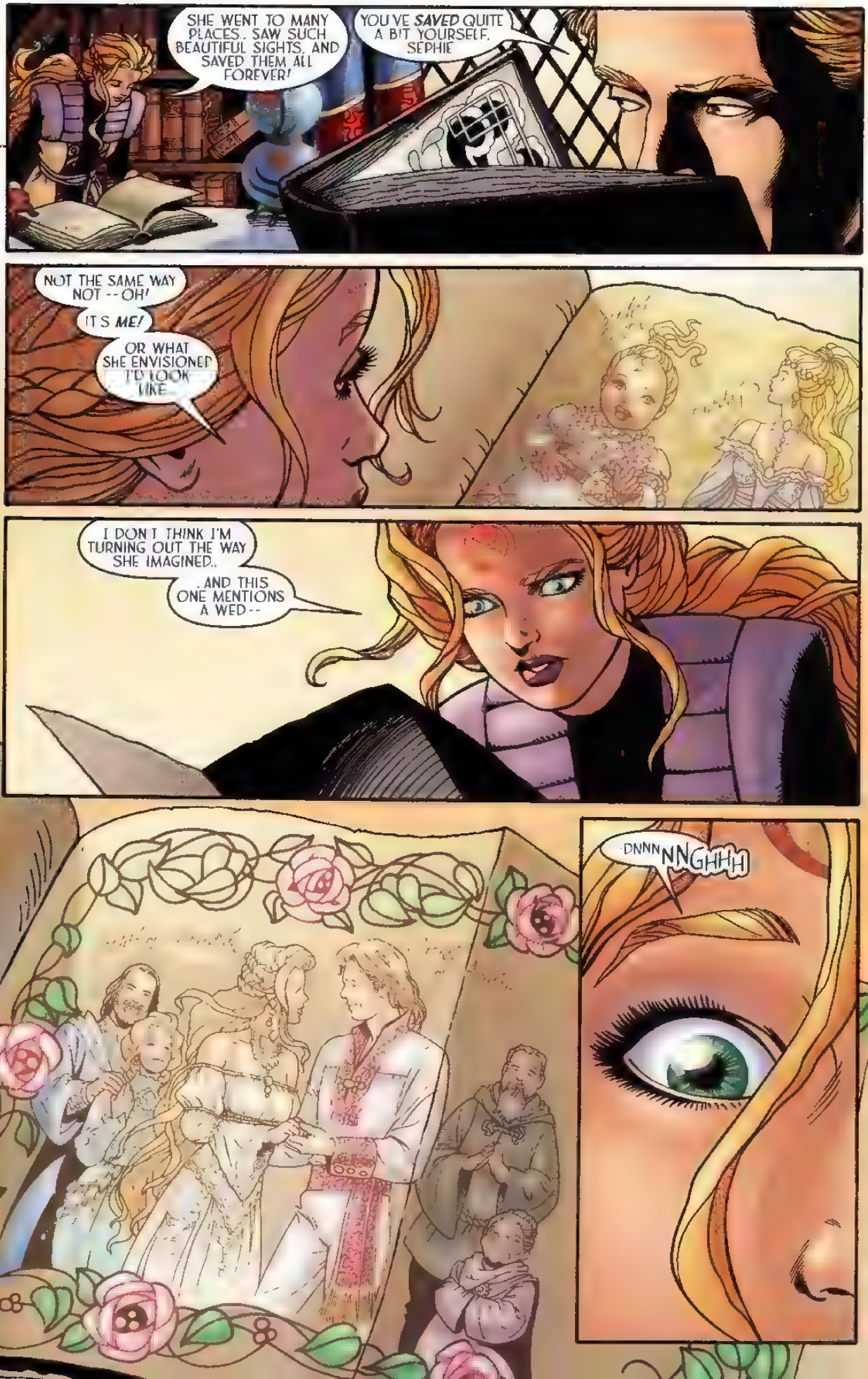
IT *IS!* IT'S MY MOTHER'S ARTWORK!

WAS YOUR AUNT CLAIRESSA ALSO AN ARTIST?

THIS SPACE WAS DEFINITELY CREATED WITH AN ARTIST IN MIND. THE LIGHT. THE CROWN MOLDINGS

MY MOTHER WAS THE ONLY ARTIST IN THE FAMILY. IF CLAIRESSA DID PAINT OR DRAW, I NEVER SAW ANY EVIDENCE

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT. THIS WHOLE ALBUM IS IDERA'S WORK AND ILAHN *NEVER* SHOWED THIS TO ME!


SHE WENT TO MANY PLACES. SAW SUCH BEAUTIFUL SIGHTS, AND SAVED THEM ALL FOREVER!
YOU'VE SAVED QUITE A BIT YOURSELF, SEPHIE
NOT THE SAME WAY NOT -- OH!
IT'S ME!
OR WHAT SHE ENVISIONED I'D LOOK LIKE...
I DON'T THINK I'M TURNING OUT THE WAY SHE IMAGINED..
..AND THIS ONE MENTIONS A WED --
DNNNNNGHHH

YOU!
WHMPP
MUSE!
IT IS MERELY WHAT SHE *WISHED* TO BE SO, NOT WHAT *MUST* BE
WHAT WAS HER WISH SEPHIE?
AAAAH.
THAT I WOULD GO TO ANHEIM AND MEET
THE PEOPLE THERE.
THEN IT'S COME TRUE!
I-I'LL SPEND TIME WITH THIS LATER
AFTER I CALL TOGETHER THE CADADORIAN COUNCIL...

AND *REINTRODUCE* MYSELF

SHE'S NOT EVEN *TWENTY*! IMAGINE THE *GALL* !

MERIDIAN'S NOT AS C VILIZED A PLACE AS CADADOR, HILEEN.

REMEMBER THAT

SHE'S EVEN GONE SO FAR AS TO CLAIM ILAHN'S VERY ESTATE!

AS IF SUCH A THING COULD BE DONE W THOUT *OUR* APPROVAL

AND BACKING

NOW NOW - THE G RL MAY PROVE TO BE MORE *FLEXIBLE* THAN ILAHN!

WHMMM

WHDDD

WHAAA!

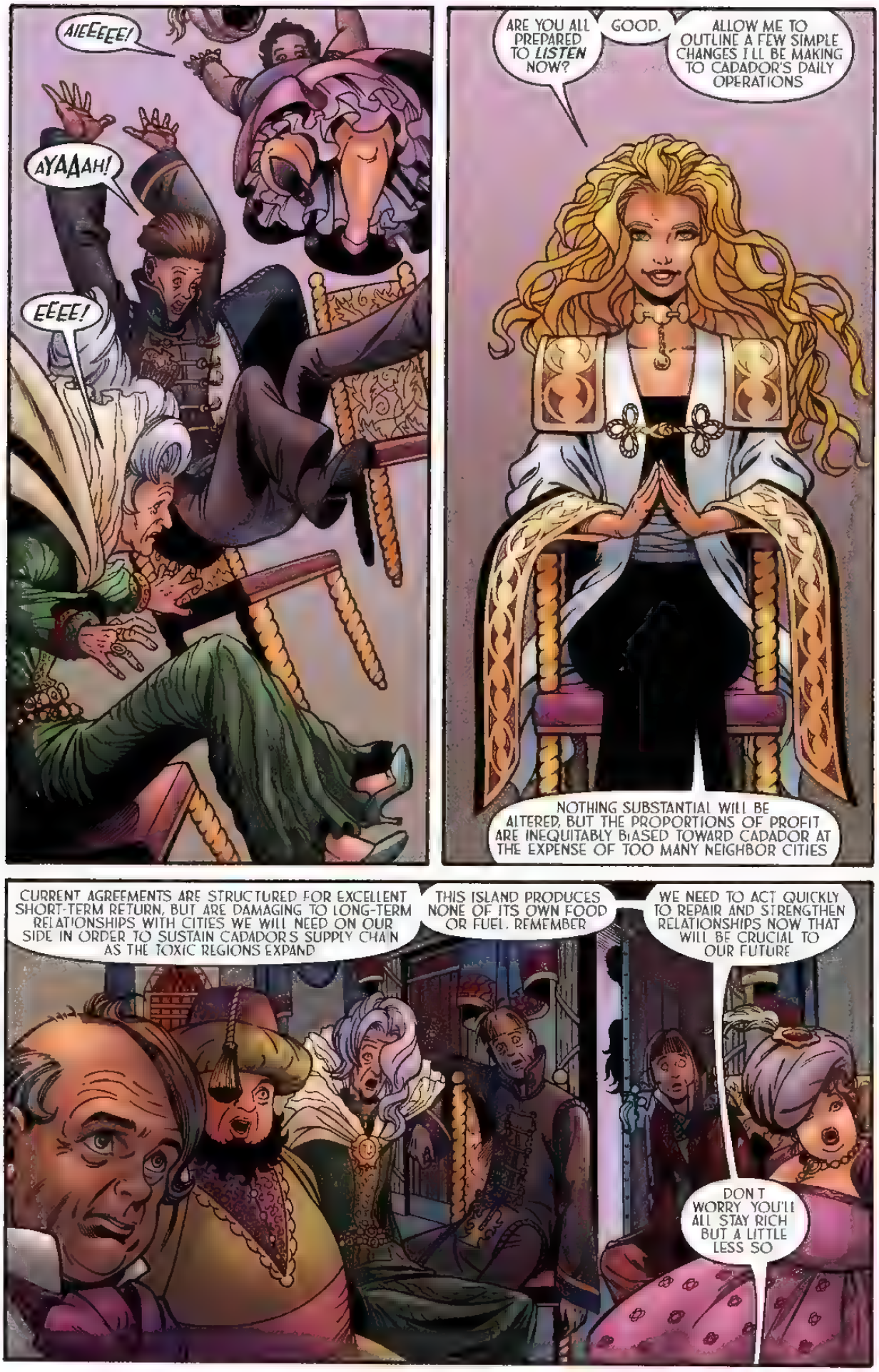
OH!

AAAAH!

COUNCILORS OF CADADOR!
THANK YOU FOR GATHERING SO QUICKLY
I AM SEPHIE MINISTER OF MERIDIAN
AND MINISTER OF CADADOR
PLEASE BE SEATED

ILAHN, CADADOR'S FORMER MINISTER, APPEARS TO BE DEAD IN HIS ABSENCE, CADADOR BECOMES MINE TO RULE BY RIGHT OF SUCCESSION
APPEARS TO BE DEAD?
BUT WITNESSES HEARD YOU SAY YOU KILLED HIM!
ILAHN HAD GONE MAD
HE THREATENED MERIDIAN WITH THE SAME FATE AS TORBEL
WOULD THE LOSS OF ANOTHER ISLAND HAVE BEEN GOOD FOR CADADOR'S BUSINESS?
OOOH!
KRNNCH
KRNNCH
NEVERTHELESS, CADADOR CANNOT ALLOW ASSUMPTION OF HER MINISTRY TO BE ACHIEVED THROUGH MURDER
YOU KILLED YOUR UNCLE TO LAY CLAIM TO CADADOR!
DO YOU THINK WE'LL STAND IDLY BY WHILE YOU PROFIT FROM YOUR CRIME?
COUNCILOR

HOW DO YOU INTEND TO STOP ME?


AIEEEEE!
AYAAAH!
EEEE!
ARE YOU ALL PREPARED TO LISTEN NOW?
GOOD.
ALLOW ME TO OUTLINE A FEW SIMPLE CHANGES I'LL BE MAKING TO CADADOR'S DAILY OPERATIONS
NOTHING SUBSTANTIAL WILL BE ALTERED, BUT THE PROPORTIONS OF PROFIT ARE INEQUITABLY BIASED TOWARD CADADOR AT THE EXPENSE OF TOO MANY NEIGHBOR CITIES
CURRENT AGREEMENTS ARE STRUCTURED FOR EXCELLENT SHORT-TERM RETURN, BUT ARE DAMAGING TO LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS WITH CITIES WE WILL NEED ON OUR SIDE IN ORDER TO SUSTAIN CADADOR'S SUPPLY CHAIN AS THE TOXIC REGIONS EXPAND
THIS ISLAND PRODUCES NONE OF ITS OWN FOOD OR FUEL. REMEMBER
WE NEED TO ACT QUICKLY TO REPAIR AND STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS NOW THAT WILL BE CRUCIAL TO OUR FUTURE
DON'T WORRY. YOU'LL ALL STAY RICH BUT A LITTLE LESS SO

THOSE PEOPLE ARE ALL SQUIRMING LIKE THEIR CLOTHES ARE TOO TIGHT
IT'S THE FIRST TIME THEY'VE EVER BEEN TALKED TO LIKE *THAT*, I'M SURE
I'M NOT SURE IT'S A GOOD IDEA FOR SEPHIE TO BE SO FORCEFUL WITH THEM -
SHE NEEDS TO WIN THEIR TRUST
THIS IS *CADADOR*, NOT PEACEFUL ANHEIM
LIKE TO LIKE -- SHE SEES WHAT CONNECTS
YES, SHE'S FOUND THE SHORTCUT TO.. DOMINATING THE NEGOTIATION, BUT IF THEY LEARN TO HATE HER, THEY'LL NEVER VOLUNTARILY ASSIST HER
SHE WILL FIND HERSELF FACING MUCH MORE THAN AN ANGRY COUNCIL.. SHE MUST BE *READY*
READY FOR WHAT?
MUSE, WHAT DO YOU *SEE* FOR HER?
IS THERE ANYTHING *I* CAN DO TO HELP HER?
HMMM.
WHAT *DO* I SEE FOR YOU?
THERE! THAT'S DONE!
NOW I'M OFF TO CONVINCE WHAT'S LEFT OF CADADOR'S SOLDIERS THAT I REALLY HAVE TAKEN CHARGE.
AREN'T YOU GONNA LET US HELP?
WHEN YOU CAN *FLY*, COTSON!
SERIOUSLY, THIS HAS TO BE JUST ME -- IF I SHOW UP IN THE PRESENCE OF ADULTS, IT WON'T MATTER WHAT I SAY *OR* DO --
-- THEY WON'T LISTEN TO THE *GIRL*

ME, I'LL JUST LOOK AT THE GIRL AND BE AMAZED IF SHE KEEPS THIS UP. SHE'S GOING TO *WIN!*

IF SHE KEEPS THIS UP, SHE'S GOING TO *SNAP*. SHE DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO HANDLE THE PRESSURE.

SHE'LL MANAGE IT ALL RIGHT -- SHE'S STRONGER THAN YOU THINK.

SHE'S STRONGER THAN SHE *KNOWS*.

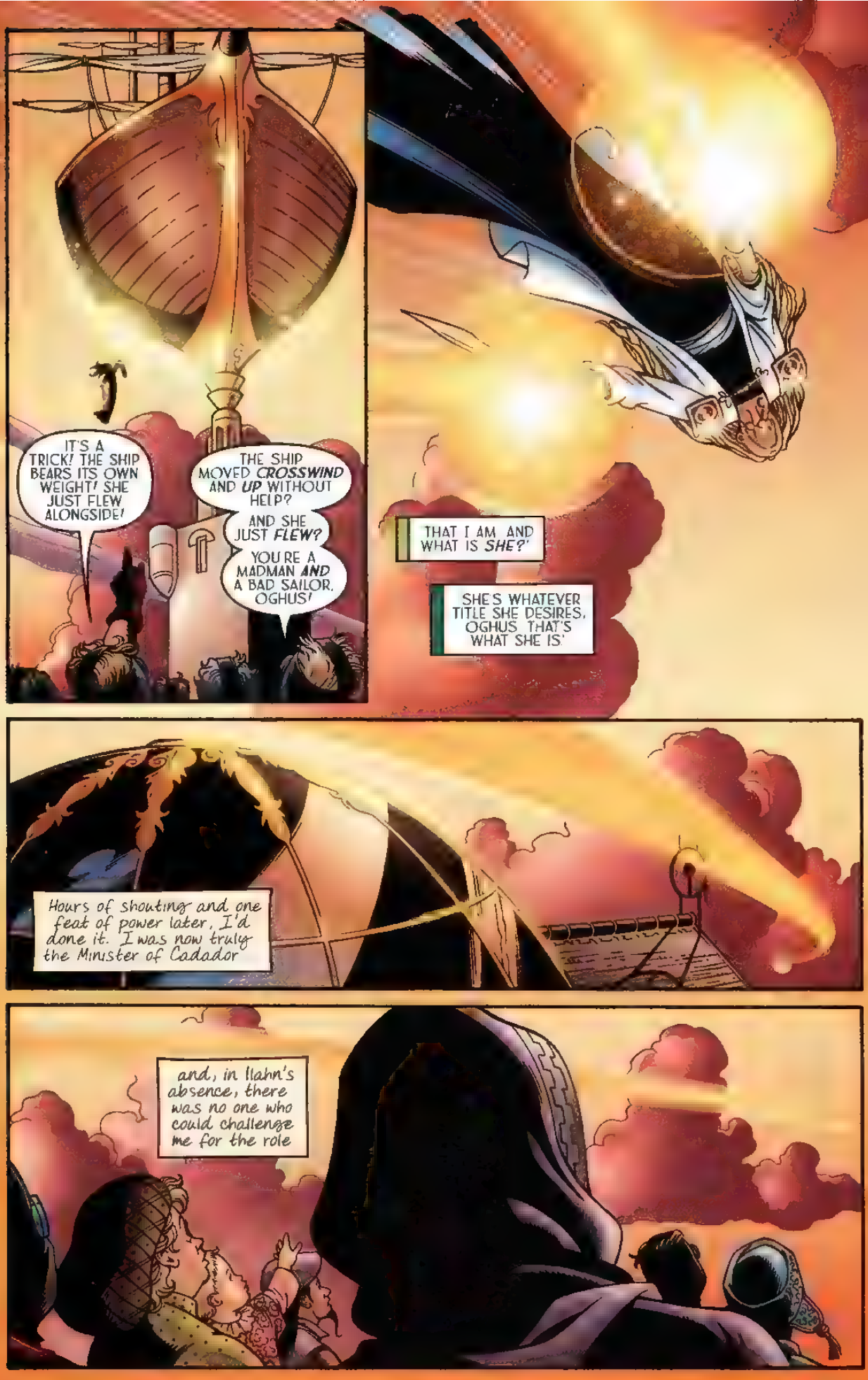
...AND YOU WILL ACCEPT ORDERS FROM NO ONE EXCEPT *ME*.

UNDERSTOOD?

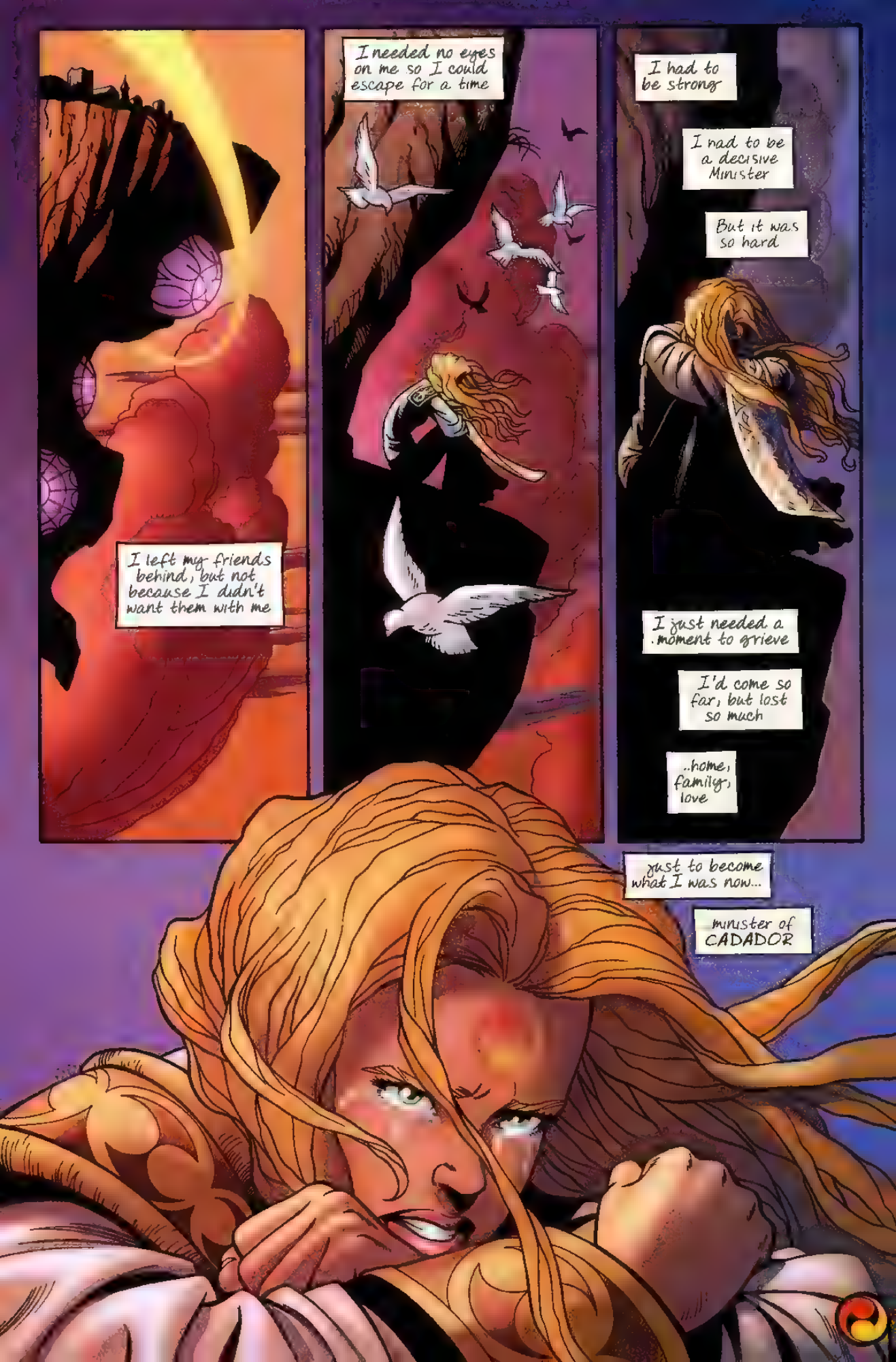
AYE!

AYE!

AYE!


IT'S A TRICK! THE SHIP BEARS ITS OWN WEIGHT! SHE JUST FLEW ALONGSIDE!
THE SHIP MOVED *CROSSWIND* AND *UP* WITHOUT HELP?
AND SHE JUST *FLEW*?
YOU'RE A MADMAN *AND* A BAD SAILOR, OGHUS!
THAT I AM. AND WHAT IS *SHE*?'
SHE'S WHATEVER TITLE SHE DESIRES, OGHUS. THAT'S WHAT SHE IS.'
Hours of shouting and one feat of power later, I'd done it. I was now truly the Minister of Cadador
and, in Ilahn's absence, there was no one who could challenge me for the role

I WOULDN'T TRUST HER
EH? WHY NOT?
SHE'S JUST OUT FOR HERSELF IF SHE'D KILL HER UNCLE
SHE'D KILL *ANYONE* TO GET POWER
IF WE PUT OUR TRUST IN HER
...WE RISK SHARING THE FATE OF ILAHN OF CADADOR
SHE'LL KILL US ALL
IS *THAT* WHAT THEY SAY? COULDN'T HAVE PUT IT BETTER MYSELF


I left my friends behind, but not because I didn't want them with me
I needed no eyes on me so I could escape for a time
I had to be strong
I had to be a decisive Minister
But it was so hard
I just needed a moment to grieve
I'd come so far, but lost so much
..home, family, love
just to become what I was now...
minister of CADADOR

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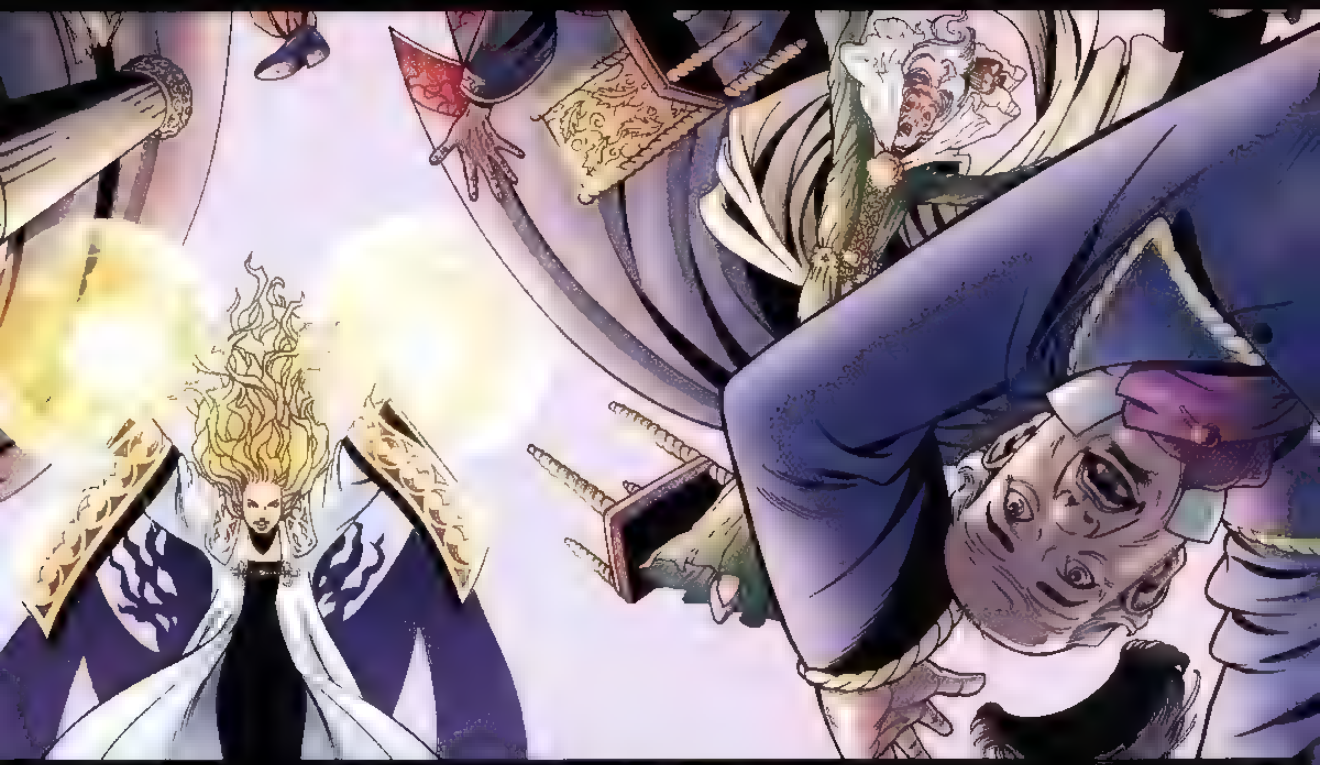
Ilahn wants to control Sephie — and Meridian — but Sephie has been fighting to resist Ilahn's control of herself and Demetria's commerce. The conflict between them erupts into a battle, during which Ilahn disappears...apparently dead at Sephie's hands. Sephie departs for Cadador to establish her rule in Ilahn's absence. She is not greeted with open arms, but after a show of power, is granted a grudging respect. In public, the new Minister of Cadador is an unstoppable leader. In private, she mourns the loss of everything familiar...



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I used to avoid going to bed. I wanted each day to last for as long as possible.
"You're going to wear out your lifetime, skipping sleep," papa would say. "You'll never get to be an old lady if you use up all those hours early."
I didn't mind. Who wanted to be old?
But I don't shy from sleeping anymore.
In the daylight world, Jad would never be by my side again.
But in my dreams..

MINISTER SEPHIE!
WAKE UP!
WHAT?!
THE COUNCIL HAS CALLED A PRIORITY SESSION AND THEY INSIST THE MINISTER ATTEND!
BUT IT'S NOT EVEN MORNING YET
DREAMING

IT'S AN EMERGENCY
THEY'RE VERY EXPERIENCED
IF THEY BELIEVE IT'S NECESSARY TO ACT WITH SUCH HASTE, IT'S SO
=SIGH=
THANK YOU, ISRE, KIKKAH--
YOU WERE RIGHT TO WAKE ME
SEND WORD TO THE COUNCIL THAT I'LL BE THERE AS QUICKLY AS I CAN
AIEEE!
THAT'S AROUDAN SILK!
UNFASTEN THE FASTENINGS!
HERE, CHILD, LET ME--
ISRE
NO FINERY IS WORTH SHRIEKING AT ME
I CAN GET DRESSED BY MYSELF--

YOU'RE FREE TO GO. DELIVER MY MESSAGE
CADADOR
YOU'VE DELIVERED ME HERE JUST AS YOU PROMISED, RHO RHUSTANE
AND WITH POWER
IT'S GOOD TO KNOW YOU'RE AS GOOD AS YOUR WORD.
FREDERIK!
MAY I ASSUME THAT THE PRESENCE OF SEPHIE'S SHIP IN CADADOR SIGNALS ILAHN'S TRIUMPH OVER HER?
OH, NO, MISS TERAMU!
REESHA, REMEMBER
REESHA
DIDN'T YOU HEAR?
THE MINISTER WAS KILLED ON MERIDIAN! SEPHIE'S COME HERE TO TAKE HIS PLACE AS MINISTER OF CADADOR! SHE'S NOT ONLY MURDERED ILAHN, SHE'S STOLEN OUR ISLAND!
ILAHN'S DEAD?

IF SHE'S HERE, THAT DOESN'T LEAVE ROOM FOR ME TO STEP IN
YET
I WAS NEVER HERE
IT'S BEEN A LONELY NIGHT, MISS TERAMU.
I HAVEN'T SEEN A SOUL PASS BY

T'LL BE SATISFYING TO PUT THAT LITTLE *UPSTART* SEPHIE N HER PLACE

ALTHOUGH SHE'LL PROBABLY COME FLOUNCING N THROUGH THE W NDOW AS F FLYING WERE *DE RIGUEUR*, THINKING SHE CAN INT M DATE *US* THROUGH SHOWS OF POWER!

SCONE?

THE CHILD HAS ALREADY SHOWN HERSELF TO BE TACTLESS, ILL BRED AND *RUDE*

SHE'L *DOUBTLESS* MAKE A DISPLAY

MERIDIAN'S TO BLAME. THE RUSTICS THERE DON'T PROPERLY REIN IN THEIR CHILDREN. THE *GIRLS*, ESPECIALLY, *RUN WILD!*

TAKE *CARE*, NURICH

WE'RE ALL FAMILIAR WITH YOUR POSITION ON THE INCLUSION OF *WOMEN* IN SOCIETY

IF I HAD SEPHIE'S GIFTS, YOU CAN BE SURE I'D MAKE AS BIG A COMMOTION AS POSSIBLE!

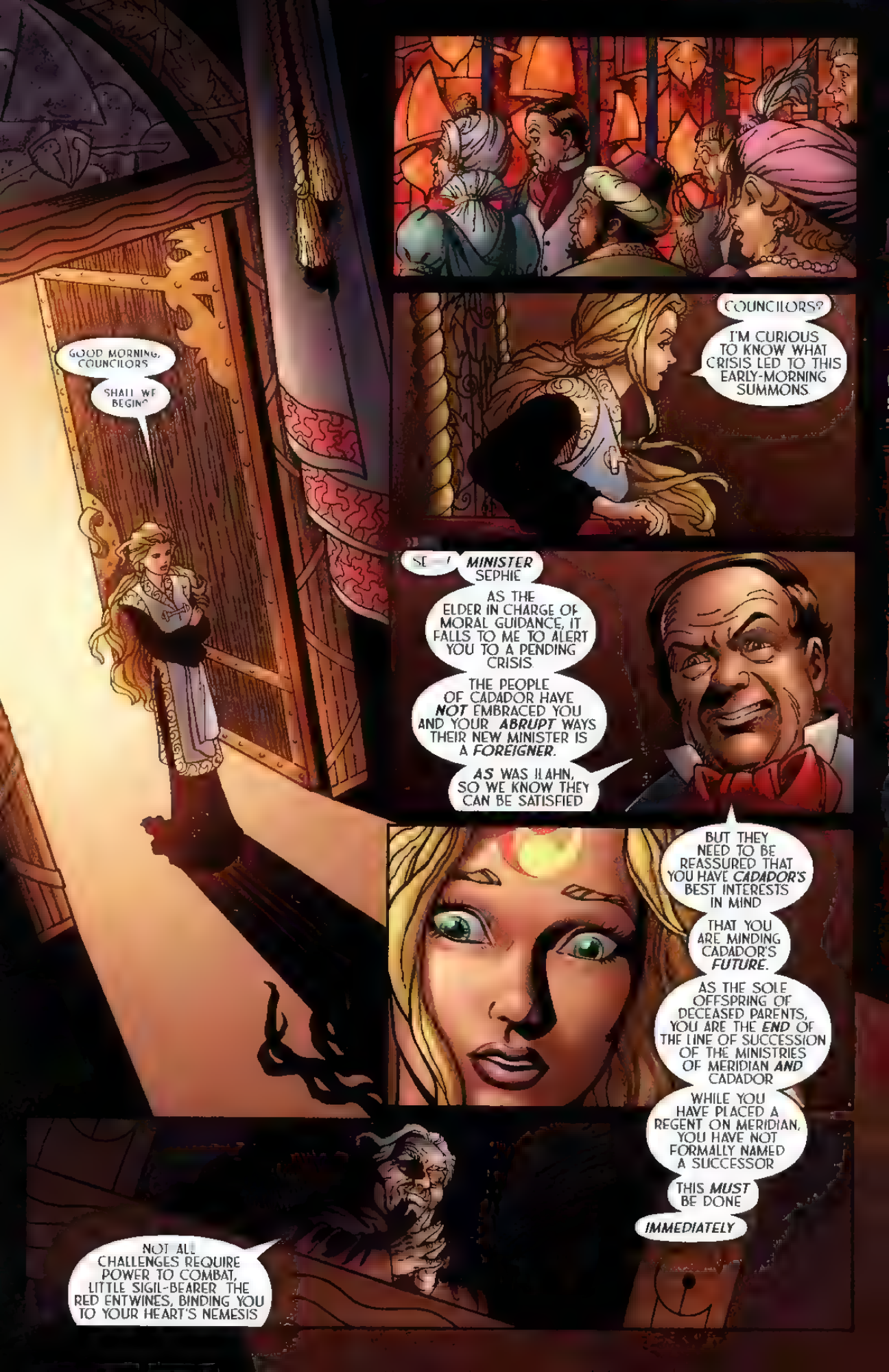
AS IF *YOUR* TROUBLESOME WAYS WEREN'T AS MUCH A TRIAL AS MINISTER SEPHIE'S *OUTRAGEOUS* ACTS!

DON'T CALL HER *MINISTER*. IT'LL ONLY ENCOURAGE HER ACTS OF TERROR IF WE

HUSH, BENJI!

LISTEN!

BRACE YOURSELVES!


GOOD MORNING, COUNCILORS
SHALL WE BEGIN?
COUNCILORS?
I'M CURIOUS TO KNOW WHAT CRISIS LED TO THIS EARLY-MORNING SUMMONS
MINISTER SEPHIE
AS THE ELDER IN CHARGE OF MORAL GUIDANCE, IT FALLS TO ME TO ALERT YOU TO A PENDING CRISIS
THE PEOPLE OF CADADOR HAVE NOT EMBRACED YOU AND YOUR ABRUPT WAYS THEIR NEW MINISTER IS A FOREIGNER.
AS WAS ILAHN, SO WE KNOW THEY CAN BE SATISFIED
BUT THEY NEED TO BE REASSURED THAT YOU HAVE CADADOR'S BEST INTERESTS IN MIND
THAT YOU ARE MINDING CADADOR'S FUTURE.
AS THE SOLE OFFSPRING OF DECEASED PARENTS, YOU ARE THE END OF THE LINE OF SUCCESSION OF THE MINISTRIES OF MERIDIAN AND CADADOR
WHILE YOU HAVE PLACED A REGENT ON MERIDIAN, YOU HAVE NOT FORMALLY NAMED A SUCCESSOR
THIS MUST BE DONE IMMEDIATELY
NOT ALL CHALLENGES REQUIRE POWER TO COMBAT, LITTLE SIGIL-BEARER. THE RED ENTWINES, BINDING YOU TO YOUR HEART'S NEMESIS

AND HAVE YOU GIVEN THOUGHT TO AN APPROPRIATE *MATE?*
IT'S TIME YOU GAVE AN *HEIR* TO BOTH ISLANDS YOU GOVERN
NATURALLY WE'LL HAVE TO *APPROVE* THE MARRIAGE
IT'S NOT AS THOUGH YOU'RE A *COMMON* GIRL.
BUT YOU WON'T BE FORCED TO MAKE THE CHOICE *ALONE*
WE SHALL SPARE NO EFFORT TO *ASSIST* YOU IN THIS IMPORTANT SELECTION
ALL WE ASK IS THAT YOU UNDERSTAND WHY THIS MUST BE YOUR HIGHEST PRIORITY
WILL YOU LET US ANNOUNCE YOUR INTENTION TO MARRY?
THE FUTURE OF TWO ISLANDS RESTS ON YOUR DECISION
AND ONE UNDERGROUND CITY

Marry

Adulthood is a series of small steps

Each one leaves a little freedom behind

My life had stepped from the path I assumed it would follow

Marry?

How could I?

There was only one perfect mate for me, and I'd sent him away

Forever

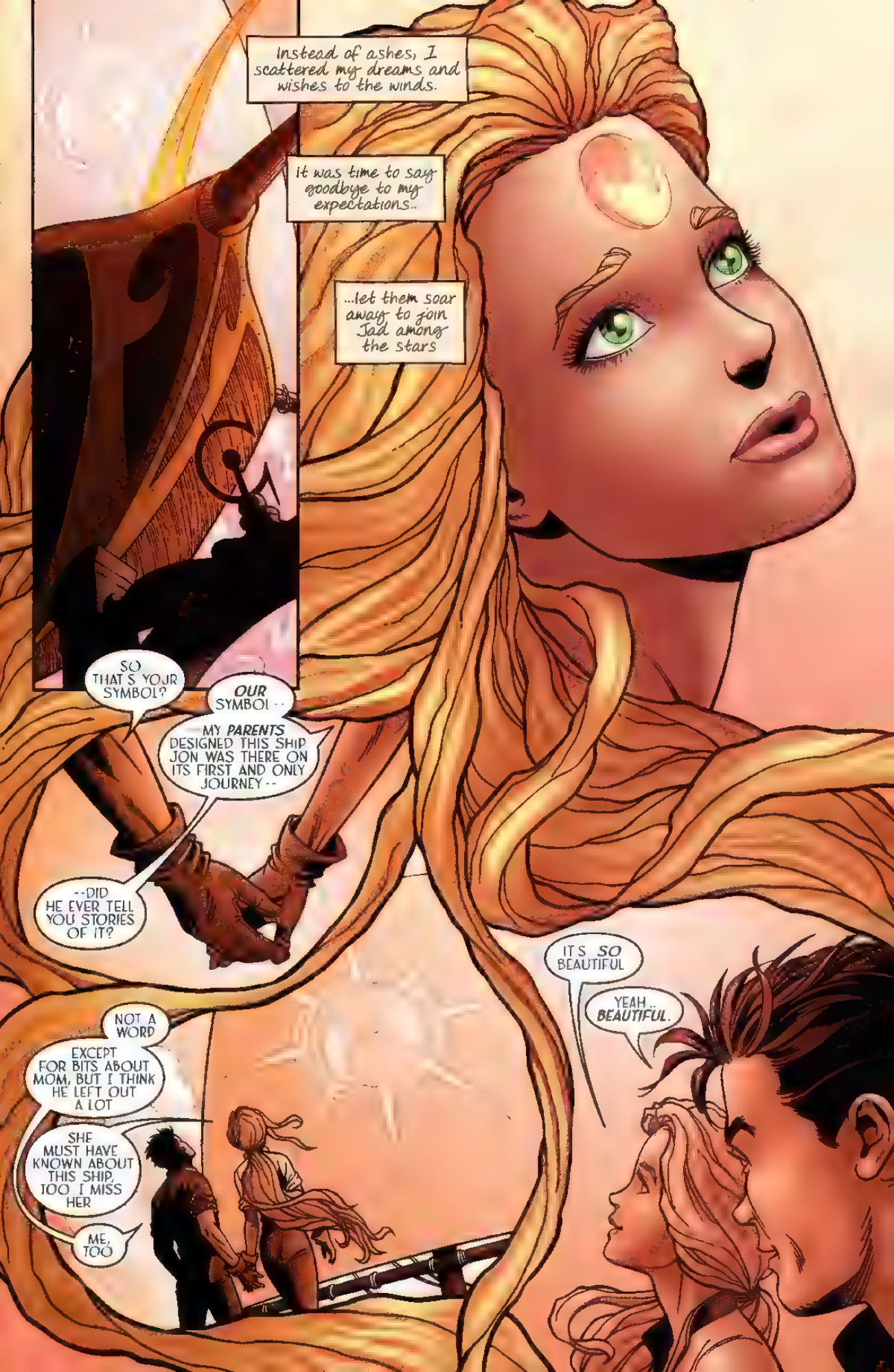
I recognized what they were doing as an attempt to distract and control me
But the trap they'd laid for me was perfect
t preyed on my own ense of responsibility
And it was the truth
Two islands depended on their one Minister now
Their orphaned, unmarried, childless Minister
There was only one answer
YOU'RE RIGHT
I NEED TO NAME AN HEIR UNTIL I CAN PRODUCE A NATURAL ONE
WE'LL START THE SEARCH TOMORROW

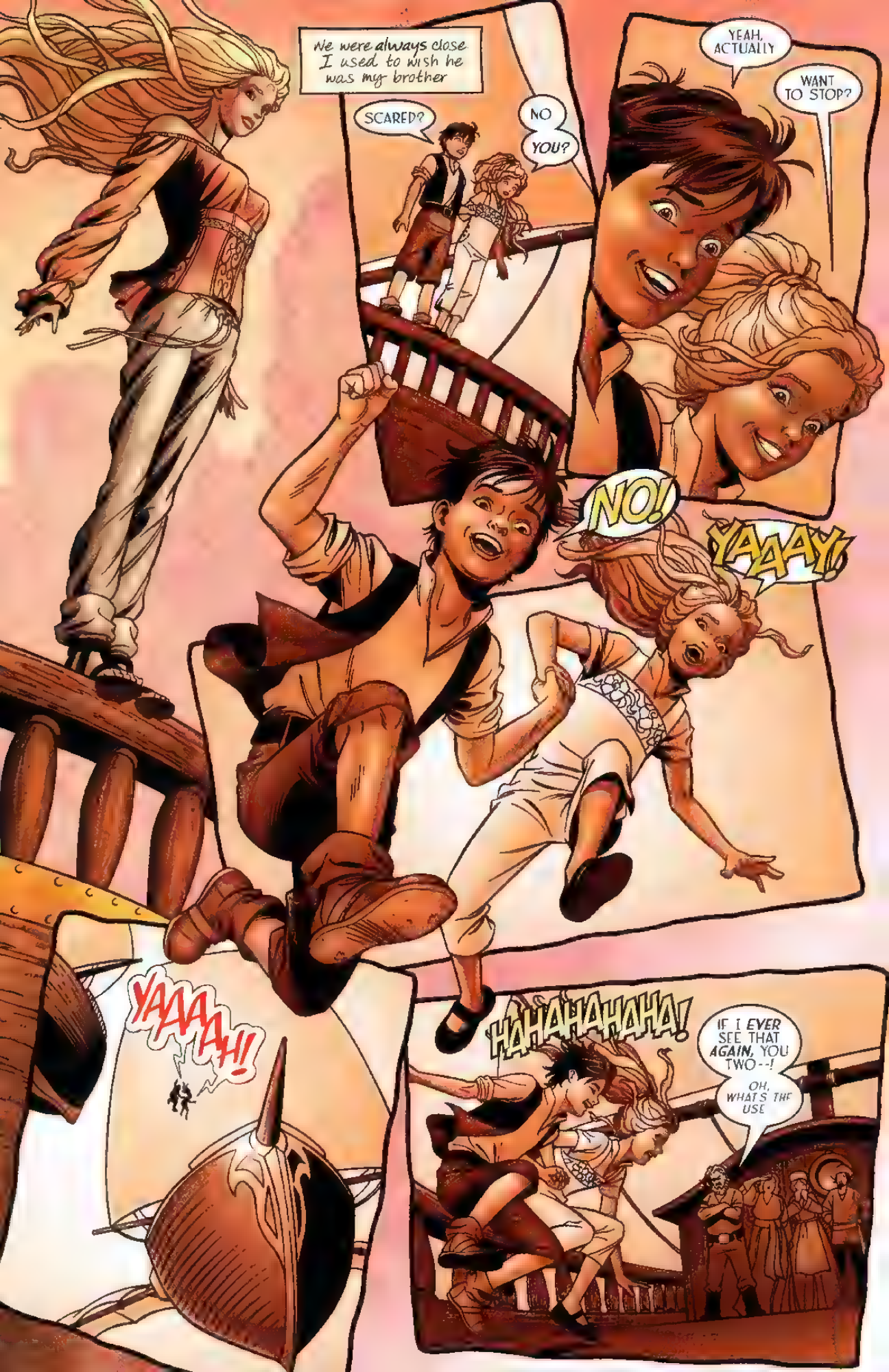
BRILLIANT, NURICH!
WHEREVER DID YOU GET THAT IDEA?
IT'S THE STRANGEST COINCIDENCE -- I WAS IN THE MOONDAHL TEAHOUSE LAST NIGHT AN INTERESTING DISCUSSION WAS BREWING
FOMENTED BY AN OVEREXCITABLE *FOREIGNER*
--AND THAT SELFISH LITTLE TWIT PLAYING AT MINISTER WILL *RUIN* THIS CITY'S PROSPECTS!
WE SEGENESE DEPEND ON STABLE TRADE WITH CAPADOR!
MERCHANTS OF *ALL* CITIES FACE STARVATION UNLESS THIS SITUATION IS RECTIFIED!
CAPADOR'S COUNCILORS ARE POWERLESS PO-NOTHINGS!
IT IS *WE* WHO MUST PROTEST!
FORCE THEM TO ACT AGAINST THE TINY TYRANT!
I LISTENED WITH HALF AN EAR AS HE MALIGNED OUR OFFICES

DO YOU WANT TO LOSE YOUR *HOMES*, YOUR *LIVELIHOODS*, YOUR *ISLAND*?
YOUR *MIND*.
TOO LATE FOR YOU ON THAT LAST POINT
I *SAY*, FELLOW-- I *DID* HAVE THE FLOOR!
INTO WHICH YOU WERE WEARING A RUT WITH THAT POINTLESS TIRADE
THERE'S A *SIMPLE* SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF THE *MINISTER* OF CAPADOR
ASK HER TO NAME AN HEIR
LEGALLY SHE *MUST*.
PRACTICALLY, IT WILL DISTRACT HER
WHICH IS WHEN I RUSHED BACK TO CONTACT YOU ALL WITH THE JOYFUL NEWS OF THE EXISTENCE OF A *LEGAL* DISTRACTION FOR OUR *OVERENTHUSIASTIC* MINISTER!'

Gone were all my old plans for the future
even ones I'd never realized I'd made until I felt them torn away like last night's sleep
There was only one place I could go

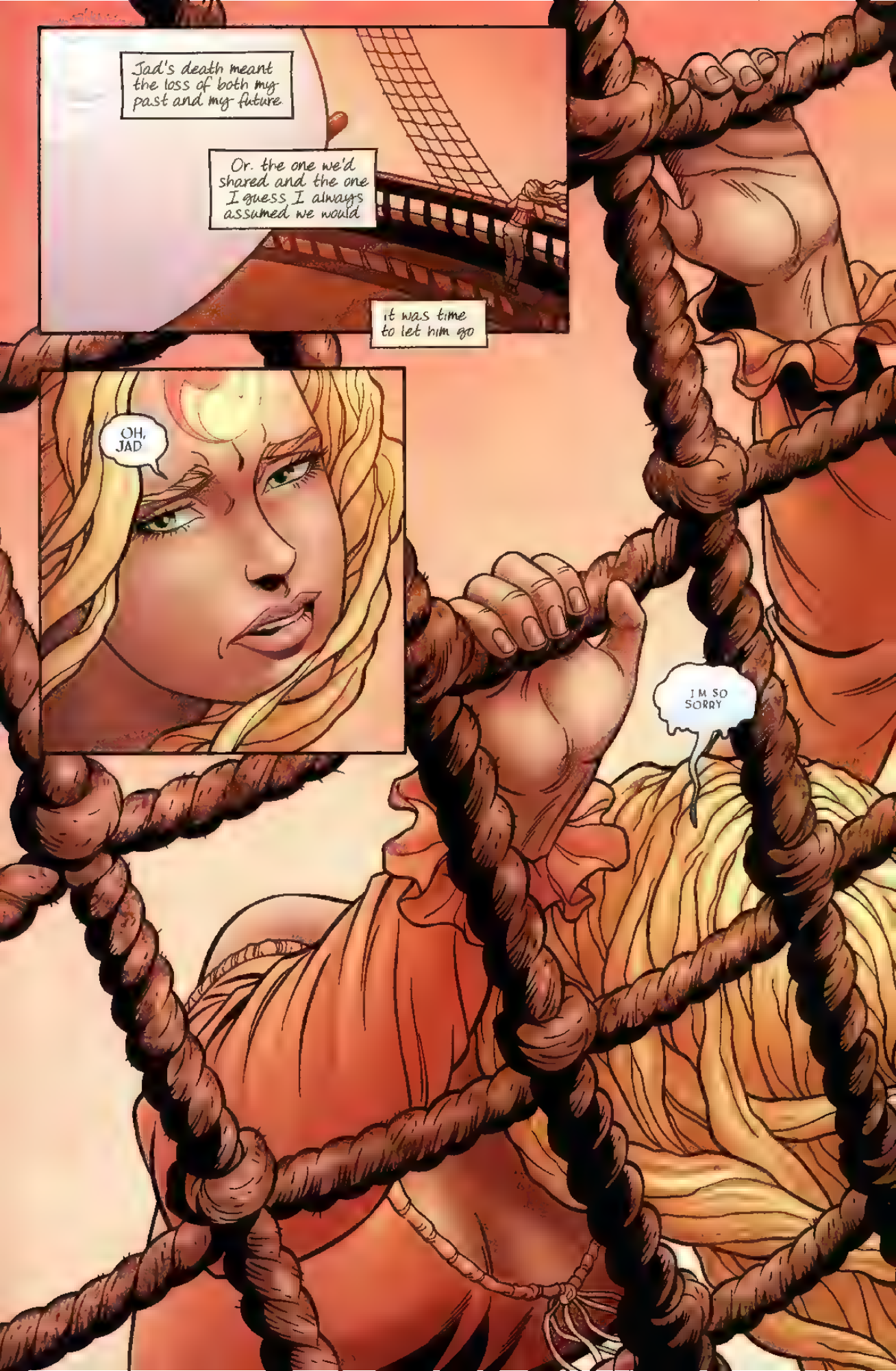
my memories
Marry.
I had no heir, true.
I'd been the one who chose to lead Cadador away from its selfish ways.
I was the one who was going to have to pay the price.
To marry for state and progeny, not love
But love was dead...
.. so what did it matter?


Instead of ashes, I scattered my dreams and wishes to the winds.
It was time to say goodbye to my expectations..
...let them soar away to join Jad among the stars
SO THAT'S YOUR SYMBOL?
OUR SYMBOL--
MY PARENTS DESIGNED THIS SHIP JON WAS THERE ON ITS FIRST AND ONLY JOURNEY--
--DID HE EVER TELL YOU STORIES OF IT?
NOT A WORD
EXCEPT FOR BITS ABOUT MOM, BUT I THINK HE LEFT OUT A LOT
SHE MUST HAVE KNOWN ABOUT THIS SHIP, TOO I MISS HER
ME, TOO
IT'S SO BEAUTIFUL
YEAH... BEAUTIFUL.


We were always close I used to wish he was my brother
SCARED?
NO
YOU?
YEAH, ACTUALLY
WANT TO STOP?
NO!
YAAAY!
YAAAAH!
HAHAHAHAHA!
IF I EVER SEE THAT AGAIN, YOU TWO--!
OH, WHAT'S THE USE

Of course, lately, I hadn't thought of Jad as a brother at all
C'MON SEPH!
WAIT! I NEED --
NO, NO -- RHO'S *DEFEATED*. HIS AIRSHIP IS OURS, AND YOU *NEED* TO LET *ME* SHOW YOU THE VIEW FROM THE CLIFFS!
BUT I SHOULD --
LEAVE THE "*SHOULDS*" FOR NOW, SEPH
JUST COME AWAY AND BE WITH *ME* FOR AWHILE
EVEN *YOU* DESERVE SOME REST TIME
PLEASE?

Time, in letting him go, to acknowledge what he was
My first love
A reckless daredevil a constant friend, a surprisingly thoughtful person..
My cruelest loss.
All those adventures together.
The ones I'd imagined would come.
YOU LOST BOTH YOUR PARENTS, CRENNER?
I LOST MY MOM --
--SHE WAS A FIGHTER, BUT SHE COULDN'T FIGHT OFF THE DISEASE THAT TOOK HER --
- BUT I CAN'T IMAGINE WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO LOSE MY DAD, TOO
SEPHIE'S HAD TO ENDURE THAT
YOU AND SEPHIE -- YOU'RE BOTH ORPHANS NOW
THAT ROTS
TELL YOU WHAT, CREN --
IF YOU NEED FAMILY, YOU'VE GOT US
ME AND SEPHIE.


Jad's death meant the loss of both my past and my future
Or. the one we'd shared and the one I guess I always assumed we would
it was time to let him go
OH, JAD
I M SO SORRY

We all have a choice with death
To keep moving beyond it's pain
or to join with it and die while still alive
GOOD JOURNEY, JAD
MY LOVE FOREVER
HMMMM
I had to live
.. just as Papa had.
He must have hurt like this when my mother died
Why did I never see his pain?
SEPHIE
YOU MIGHT WANT TO SEE THIS

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MERIDIAN®

Barbara Kesel
Steve McNiven
Tom Simmons
Morry Hollowell

Far away on the world of Demetria, explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

One of these islands is Meridian, home of shipbuilders and Sephie. Sephie has become the Minister of Meridian after her father Turos' death. Her uncle Ilahn is the Minister of the rich city-state of Cadador, which controls most of the shipping and trade on Demetria.

A mysterious force has endowed both Sephie and Ilahn with power – opposing forces – Ilahn's destruction versus Sephie's renewal.

Ilahn wants to control Sephie – and Meridian – but Sephie has been fighting to resist Ilahn's control of herself and Demetria's commerce. The conflict between them erupts into a battle, during which Ilahn disappears...apparently dead at Sephie's hands.

Sephie departs for Cadador to establish her rule in Ilahn's absence. She is not greeted with open arms but, after a show of power, is granted a grudging respect. Political wheels turn, however, and Cadador's councilors force Sephie to acknowledge that she, an unmarried orphan, must now concentrate on providing an heir for both Cadador and Meridian. Since Sephie believes her childhood love Jad is dead, she resigns herself to a loveless marriage.

A distraction from her worries lies in a logbook from her ship's first journey decades ago, when her parents tried to unite surface and sky...

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So much was happening

Chaos

Sadness.

GYAAAAR!

TUROS!

NOT LIKE *THAT!*

THAT'S *NOT* HOW THE FUTURE MINISTER OF MERIDIAN SHOULD BE RECORDED FOR HISTORY

Responsibility weighed heavily on shoulders prepared, but never before tested.

IS THE FUTURE MINISTER'S BELOVED WIFE AND STERN TASKMASTER *HAPPY* NOW?

VERY! NOW HOLD STILL!

As always, Papa's lessons buoyed me through the turbulent winds of change.

Keeping me going

PAPA LOOKS SO YOUNG.

AND I'D SWEAR I CAN HEAR HIS LAUGHTER

EMPATHY LENDS ITSELF TO THAT KIND OF PHENOMENON

GHETAN .. THIS LOGBOOK IS INCREDIBLE!

WHERE DID YOU FIND IT?

HIDDEN WITHIN THE HULL -- MOST LIKELY SINCE THIS SHIP'S *FIRST* VOYAGE -- INSIDE A CLEVERLY-DESIGNED SLIDING PANEL--

OF COURSE!

MOTHER AND ***FATHER*** BUILT THIS SHIP--I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN TO LOOK THERE RIGHT AWAY IF I'D BEEN *THINKING*..

BUT I'VE BEEN TOO BUSY THINKING OF MY JOURNEY ***NOW.***

THEY WERE TRYING TO CREATE A UNIFIED DEMETRIA WITHOUT THE ADVANTAGES MY SIGIL GIVES ME

SOMETIMES I'M ALMOST CONVINCED THE JOB IS TOO BIG.

..DO YOU SUPPOSE THEY FACED THE SAME KIND OF FEARS?

EN ROUTE TO AROUD ALONG THE UPPER VESTA WINDS, SIGHTINGS BETWEEN THE TERRAIN'S COASTLINE AND THE ISLAND OF GHANMELA. SIXTEEN HOURS FROM CAYMORO. SKY FAIR, WINDS UNSEASONABLY STRONG. FOR ONE WHO'S NOT A SAILOR, I SEEM TO BE PICKING UP A CERTAIN FEEL FOR THE WAVES OF THE AIR.

OUR NEXT DESTINATION IS AROUD. WE'VE BEEN TOLD THAT MINISTER THERE, DESPITE INTERNAL STRIFE, HAS MADE IT CLEAR HE'S OPEN TO ALTERNATIVES TO CADADOR'S STRONGHOLD ON SHIPPING

Papa always seemed so old

I know now that he was aged beyond his years by Ilahn's poisons

But he was young on this ship's first voyage, as related in Mother's pictures

so young

So strong

CAN I MOVE YET?

I MUST REALLY LOVE YOU, TO PUT UP WITH THIS.

NOT YET.

AND YOU DO.

So real

WAIT---!

I DON'T LIKE THAT SOUND.

IDERIA---

TUROS?

STARS TAKE US

WREEEEEEN

--GET DOWN!

--HOW DO THEY MOVE SO *FAST?*

WHUNKT

ZWWWWWPT

KLANGK

I SPEAK ON BEHALF OF CHADESSUR, MINISTER OF AROUD

YOU ARE ENTERING OUR TERRITORY WITHOUT CONSENT

WHO SPEAKS FOR YOUR SHIP?

I DO *TUROS*, MINISTER-TO-BE OF *MERIDIAN*

I LEAD THE UNITY EXPEDITION

WE COULD GREET EACH OTHER MORE EASILY WITHOUT THE WEAPON BETWEEN US...?

...

GENERAL CORAQAM

GENERAL CORAQAM, I'M HERE TO BUILD A COALITION OF TRADE STATES INDEPENDENT OF CADADOR'S CONTROL

SSSSKT

MIGHT AROUD NOT *BENEFIT* FROM FAIRER TRADE?

I UNDERSTAND IT'S BEEN *DISCUSSED*.

WELCOME TO AROUD MINISTER OF MERIDIAN

WELL, *THAT* LOOKS FRIENDLIER

JON

BUT I NOTICE YOUR MEN STILL STAND READY TO ATTACK, GENERAL

I CAN'T HAVE THAT ON MY SHIP

LOWER YOUR WEAPONS!

OUR LIONS ARE CAGED, TUROS

YOURS STANDS BY YOUR SIDE

JON?

DROP IT, JON

I DON'T LIKE THIS, TUROS. NO MESSENGER--THEY JUST DROP A SQUAD ON US?

SOMETHING'S BREWING HERE-- WE SHOULD TAKE OUR LEAVE AND *MOVE ON*

JON, JON--

WE NEED TO GET YOU OFF THE SHIP MORE.

WE'RE *GUESTS* HERE

EXCUSE HIM, PLEASE

GENERAL CORAQAM, MAY I PRESENT MY CAPTAIN, JON TAKARTY

I ADMIRE YOUR SPIRIT, CAPTAIN TAKARTY

IF YOU'LL FOLLOW US DOWN TO THE SURFACE NOW--

-WE'LL SHOW YOU THE HOSPITABLE SIDE OF AROUD

CADAPOR'S SUPREMACY DEPENDS ON A LACK OF ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION CORRIDORS AND THE THREAT OF HOSTILE REINFORCEMENT OF CONTRACTS

NOW THAT MY BROTHER RESIDES THERE AND CAN HELP STEER ITS GOVERNMENT THE INFLUENCE OF HIS BEING RAISED ON MERCHANT'S BOUND TO OPEN OPTIONS FOR TRADERS

KJARAMAS, WILL YOUR FATHER BE JOINING US SOON?

MY APOLOGIES, TUROS I AM *CERTAIN* HE WOULD BE *FASCINATED* BY *ALL* YOU HAVE BEEN TELLING ME THIS LAST HOUR BUT THE MINISTER IS *DELAYED*

AS WAS I

I BEG PARDON FOR MY TARDY ARRIVAL

JALEA CORAQAM--

--YOU'RE *NEVER* ON TIME, BUT *ALWAYS* WORTH THE WAIT!

THAT'S THE GENERAL?

THE GENERAL IS A MAGNIFICENT CREATURE, IS SHE NOT?

I MAY MAKE HER MINE ONE DAY!

OH IS THAT THE PLAN?

IT IS A FANTASY WITH WHICH MY MINISTER'S SON INDULGES HIS IMAGINATION--

HE KNOWS I AM WEDDED TO MY WORK.

AREN'T WE ALL?

THANKS.

A TOAST TO THE HARDWORKING CLASS, GENERAL CORAQAM--

THOSE WHO TOIL ENDLESSLY IN SUPPORT OF THEIR MINISTERS-TO-BE!

IS IT THE HABIT OF MERIDIAN'S PEOPLE TO SPEAK SO FREELY?

I WOULD HAVE THE *HEADS* OF THOSE WHO TALKED SO ABOUT *MY* MINISTRY

WHEN *YOU'RE* MINISTER OF AROUD, I'LL BEHAVE

BEST WATCH YOUR TONGUE STRANGER

THESE LAND DWELLING SAVAGES DRIVE A HARD BARGAIN

I SHOULD KNOW I'M HERE TO SELL 'EM BAUBLES, TIMEPIECES ORNAMENTS OF ALL SORTS

WORTHLESS RUNK, ACTUALLY BUT IT KEEPS THE ECONOMY OF DURAKA AFLOAT!

H-HA! AFLOAT! *LIKE* OUR ISLANDS!

OH!

YOU'LL HAVE TO FORGIVE MASTER KEWAYD, SIR--

HE'S *VERY* FATIGUED FROM OUR JOURNEY

AH, FELLOW, MAY I PRESENT *MIRA DRAJUNA* OF DURAKA!

JON TAKARTY OF *MERIDIAN*

H-HAVE A SEAT, MA'AM

DELIGHTED T'MAKE YUHR ACHQUAINTANSHE

MAY I COMPLIMENT YOUR WIFE ON HER GREAT BEAUTY?

HO! THAT'S NOT MY WIFE, MERELY MY CLERK!

THEN MAY I COMPLIHMENT ALL THE LADIESH IN MY COMPANY ON THEIR BEAUTY..

AROUD FOR ITSH HOSTIPALITY.. AND FINE WINES.

TUROS JON DOESN'T USUALLY DRINK SO MUCH, DOES HE?

JON'S DRINKING?

AN' THE UNIVERSH FOR GRANTING ME A SEAT AT THISH PARTICULAR TABLE

MIRA

ISH IT?

LEAVE HIM. HE'LL COME TO.

MASTER ILAHN?

EXCUSE ME FOR INTERRUPTING, MASTER ILAHN, BUT...SHE'S SUCCUMBED.

I'M SORRY---

---WE DID ALL WE COULD.

IT WAS NOT UNEXPECTED MY WIFE WAS A FRAGILE WOMAN ..

..WEAK.

LEAVE ME, PLEASE, BOSCAU.

AS YOU WISH, MASTER

KLEK

YOUR MAN IS AROUND--HE WON'T *FAIL* ME?

HE KNOWS THE LOSS TO HIM IF HE DOES THEY WILL *NOT* LEAVE THE CITY ALIVE, ILAHN

MINISTER ILAHN

YOU HEARD THE NEWS OF MY WIFE'S DEATH JUST NOW?

TRAGIC.

IT MEANS I MUST NOW RULE *CADADOR* --

--THE MOST POWERFUL CITY-STATE ON DEMETRIA --

--*ALONE.*

ALL THAT POWER IN *MY* HANDS

DON'T DISAPPOINT ME

" BECAUSE I ALSO EXPECT TO BE RULING *MERIDIAN* SOON."

I'M *EXHAUSTED.*

DO YOU THINK THAT DID ANY GOOD?

FOR ALL HIS FLATTERY, KJARAMAS ISN'T CONVINCED

UNLESS WE CAN SPEAK DIRECTLY TO THE MINISTER, WE CAN'T COUNT AROUD AS AN ALLY

SO WE HAVE ONE SMALL SETBACK

WE ALREADY HAVE *TWENTY* ON OUR SIDE.

IMAGINE IDERIA--

OUR DAUGHTER COULD KNOW A WORLD COMPLETELY CHANGED

ONE WHERE ONE'S BIRTHPLACE WAS THE BEGINNING OF LIFE'S JOURNEY, NOT A DETERMINER OF ONE'S FATE.

TUROS, OUR DAUGHTER DOESN'T EVEN EXIST!

YET.

EVERYTHING WE'RE DOING NOW WILL AFFECT--

AIEEEE!

STOP IT!

GO BACK TO THE CABIN, IDERIA!

WHILE YOU HEAD INTO DANGER UNPROTECTED? NOT HARDLY!

PLEASE, KEWAYD!

I WAS *NOT* HIRED FOR *THIS!*

AH, MIRA, JUST A SMALL SHOW OF FRIENDLINESS.

MIRA!

LET HER *GO!*

HNNRRRFF

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

HNNRRRFF

WOULD YOU CARE TO APOLOGIZE TO THIS WOMAN, OR DO I RUN YOU THROUGH?

GENERAL, WAIT! DON'T *KILL* HIM!

AH *NO*. NO KILL! NO KILL!

I'M *WAITING*

AROUD HOLDS NO MERCY FOR THOSE WHO TAKE WHAT ISN'T OFFERED TO THEM BUT I'LL BOW TO THE MORE PEACEFUL CONVENTIONS. BE OUR GUESTS FROM MER.DIAN!

HARE YOU ALL RIGHT, MIRA?

DO YOU NEED SOMEONE TO ACCOMPANY YOU BACK TO YOUR CABINS?

THAT WOULD BE MOST KIND, JON

OH *HO*.

ALTHOUGH KILLING H M MIGHT TEACH HIM A LESSON, I APPRECIATE YOUR RESTRAINT

NO! NO! NO KILL!

SO IT'S TIME TO DROP YOUR BLADE?

HUH?

WHA ISH--?

TUROS--

DOWN!

WHA--?

HAH!

AH!

NO--

KI--

IDERIA!

KEEP DOWN! I HAVE HIM!

KEWAYD.

I'M FINE, TUROS!

OH, MIRA

I'M ARMED!

KEEP BEHIND ME!

I'VE GOT TWO OF 'EM!

BOTH WORK FINE!

YOU ARE A STUBBORN FOOL, JON TAKARTY!

DON'T GET MANY MERIDIANITES DOWN HERE, DO YOU?

JALEA? WHAT S WRONG?

HUH? FUNNY PLACE TA

KJARAMAS! DID YOU SEE HIM?

HIM WHO?

I WAS JUST DRAWN BY ALL THE SHOUTING

DRAWN TO THE WOODSH?

GO HOME!

THERE'S AN ASSASSIN OUT!

REALLY

WELL

IF HE MADE IT UP THERE...

OUR ASSASHHIN HAS *WINGS.*

WE WON'T FIND HIM

YOU HAVE A FIERCE HEART, JON TAKARTY

...EVEN IF IT IS COUPLED WITH A FOOLHARDY *HEAD*

YOU'RE A STRIKING SIGHT YOURSELF, GENERAL

ALTHOUGH I CAN'T SAY MUCH FOR AROUDAN SHECURITY.

WAIT

LOOK HERE

CAREFUL... DO NOT LOOK TOO CLOSELY

THERE ARE CONNECTIONS WE MUST NOT MAKE IN WHAT WE HAVE SEEN THIS NIGHT

TUROSH WE NEED TO LEAVE AROUD, *SOON*

WHY? WHAT DID YOU--?

IT S *MINE.*

SOMEBODY WANTS TO SCUTTLE OUR MISSION

NOT *AGAIN.*

YOU W LL BE SAFE IN *MY* PRESENCE, TUROS.

HE HAS ENJOYED HIS TARGET ALREADY -- THIS ASSASS N WOULD NOT DARE THE *MINISTER'S* WRATH BY HARMING *ME*

YES, WE ALL KNOW THE MINISTER'S SON WOULD *NEVER* BE THE OBJECT OF AN ATTACK LIKE *THIS* ONE

WISELY SAID, JALEA

I LOOK FORWARD TO HAVING YOU AS *MY* GENERAL

WILL YOU JOIN ME IN MY QUARTERS?

COME!

THIS IS A RARE EVENT-- LET S *ALL* TAKE ADVANTAGE OF KJARAMAS HOSPITALITY!

I DON T KNOW--

PLEASE, COME ALONG

YOU SHRUG OFF AN ASSASSINATION SO EASILY?

THIS IS *AROUD!*

A BOOR LIES DEAD, VICTIM OF HIS OWN LUST

WE'VE WEATHERED CENTURIES OF TURBULENCE, YET LIFE GOES ON

THE ASSASSIN'S TARGET APPEARED TO BE *YOU*, TUROS PERHAPS YOU SHOULD TRAVEL WITH GREATER SECURITY

HA! SHOULD WE HIRE THE GENERAL AWAY FROM AROUD, TUROS?

I THINK KJARAMAS'D HAVE YOUR HEAD FOR THAT

WHELL..

I RAISE A GLASS TO NEW FRIENDS AND TRAGEDIES SURVIVED.

AND HERE'S TO THE PROSPHECT OF GETTING TO KNOW *YOU* BETTER

TO THE *FHUTURE!*

HMMM

GOOD MORNING

HUSBAND

OUR SHIP WILL DEPART SOON, NO?

GENERAL?

--WHICH IS WHY IT'S BEST THAT I GO WITH YOU, JON

YOU DON'T SEE ME COMPLAINING, DO YOU, GEN--

JALEA.

--WHICH IS WHY IT'S BEST THAT YOU COME WITH US, MIRA!

YOU SAID DURAKA OFFERED YOU NO PROSPECTS...

...YOU'RE FREE TO CHANGE YOUR MIND AND RETURN HOME IF--

I-- I ACCEPT, LADY IDERIA

JUST IDERIA. I LOATHE AIRS.

TUROS . IDERIA...

MIRA

MAY I PRESENT JALEA...TAKARTY

WELL! THE HOSPITALITY HERE *IS* LEGENDARY

WELCOME ABOARD, GENERAL

ARE YOU FAM LIAR WITH OUR NEXT DESTINATION-- *SHERISTAN?*

SHERISTAN?

BUT I THOUGHT--

ISN'T THAT A *MYTHICAL* CITY?

SHERISTAN HOLDS MANY ANSWERS.

SHERISTAN

SOMEDAY

" I'VE GOT TO GO THERE "

HUH?

My spirits were lifted by Ghetan's discovery of my father's logbook.

My parents had also faced resistance, adversity choices

Yet they'd persevered

Kept going

WHERE AM I?

That's all you have to do sometimes

just keep going

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MERIDIAN
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Far away on the world of Demetria,

explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

One of these islands is Meridian, home of shipbuilders and Sephie. Sephie has become the Minister of Meridian after her father Turos' death. Her uncle Ilahn is the Minister of the rich city-state of Cadador, which controls most of the shipping and trade on Demetria.

A mysterious force has endowed both Sephie and Ilahn with power – opposing forces – Ilahn's destruction versus Sephie's renewal.

Ilahn wants to control Sephie – and Meridian – but Sephie has been fighting to resist Ilahn's control of herself and Demetria's commerce. The conflict between them erupts into a battle, during which Ilahn disappears... apparently dead at Sephie's hands.

Sephie departs for Cadador to establish her rule in Ilahn's absence. She is not greeted with open arms, but after a show of power, is granted a grudging respect. Political wheels turn, however, and Cadador's councilors force Sephie to acknowledge that she, an unmarried orphan, must now concentrate on providing an heir for both Cadador and Meridian. Since Sephie believes her childhood love Jad is dead, she resigns herself to a loveless marriage.

Months ago, Ilahn withheld ore from Torbel, causing the island of the ironworkers to topple and fall into the ocean with great loss of life. The Torbellians who were able to be evacuated from their island in time have been scattered to many friendly islands, including Meridian, but the horror of that day keeps the embers of rebellion alive in their hearts...

Meridian® Vol. 1 Issue 30 DECEMBER 2002 FIRST PRINTING Published by CG Entertainment, Inc. Office of publication 4023 Tampa Road Suite 2400 Oldsmar Florida 34677 **Meridian®, CrossGen®, CrossGen Comics®, CrossGeneration®, CrossGeneration Comics®** and the **CrossGen sigil®** are registered trademarks of CrossGeneration Comics, Inc. The **CG Entertainment logo™** and all prominent **Meridian®** characters and images are Trademark and Copyright 2002 CrossGeneration Comics, Inc. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. The stories, incidents and characters in this publication are fictional. Any similarities to persons living or dead are purely coincidental. With the exception of artwork used for review purposes, none of the contents of this book may be reproduced in any form without the express written consent of CrossGeneration Comics, Inc. PRINTED IN CANADA

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READY?
GO TO IT
We first learn of loyalty as a function of family
I'LL HAVE IT READY
Although we strive for equity among all people, we favor our own
As we get older, we understand the responsibility of our allegiance to our island
UH?
WHOMP
We are now part of a family bigger than the one tied to us by blood

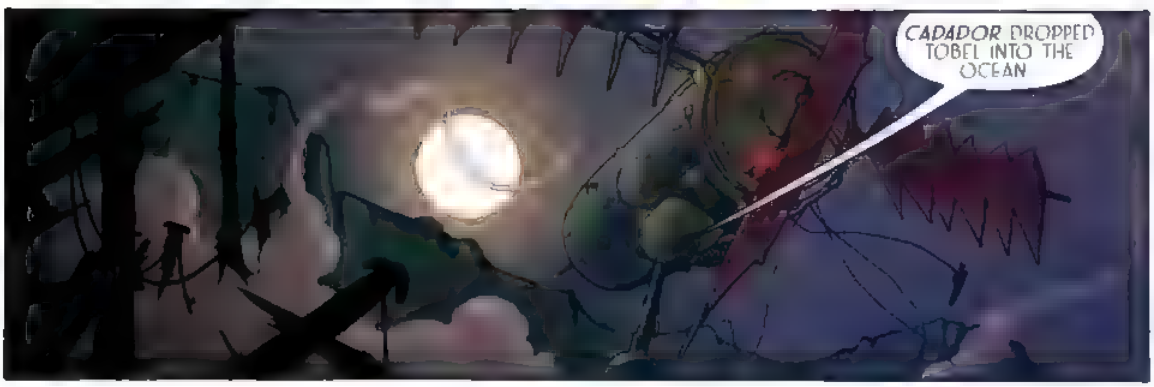
But the natural bias remains--
We still favor our own
IT'S OURS

ANYONE ABOARD?
NOT A SOUL
THEY'VE GUARDED IT AGAINST THRILLSEEKERS NOT THEFT

KIND PEOPLE, THESE MERIDIANITES -- WILLING TO BELIEVE THE BEST OF OTHERS
WILLING TO SHARE EVERYTHING THEY'VE LEARNED, INCLUDING THE FINER POINTS OF CONTROLLING THIS AIRSHIP
I HATE TO HARM A ONE OF THEM

BUT THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO LOSE YOUR ISLAND

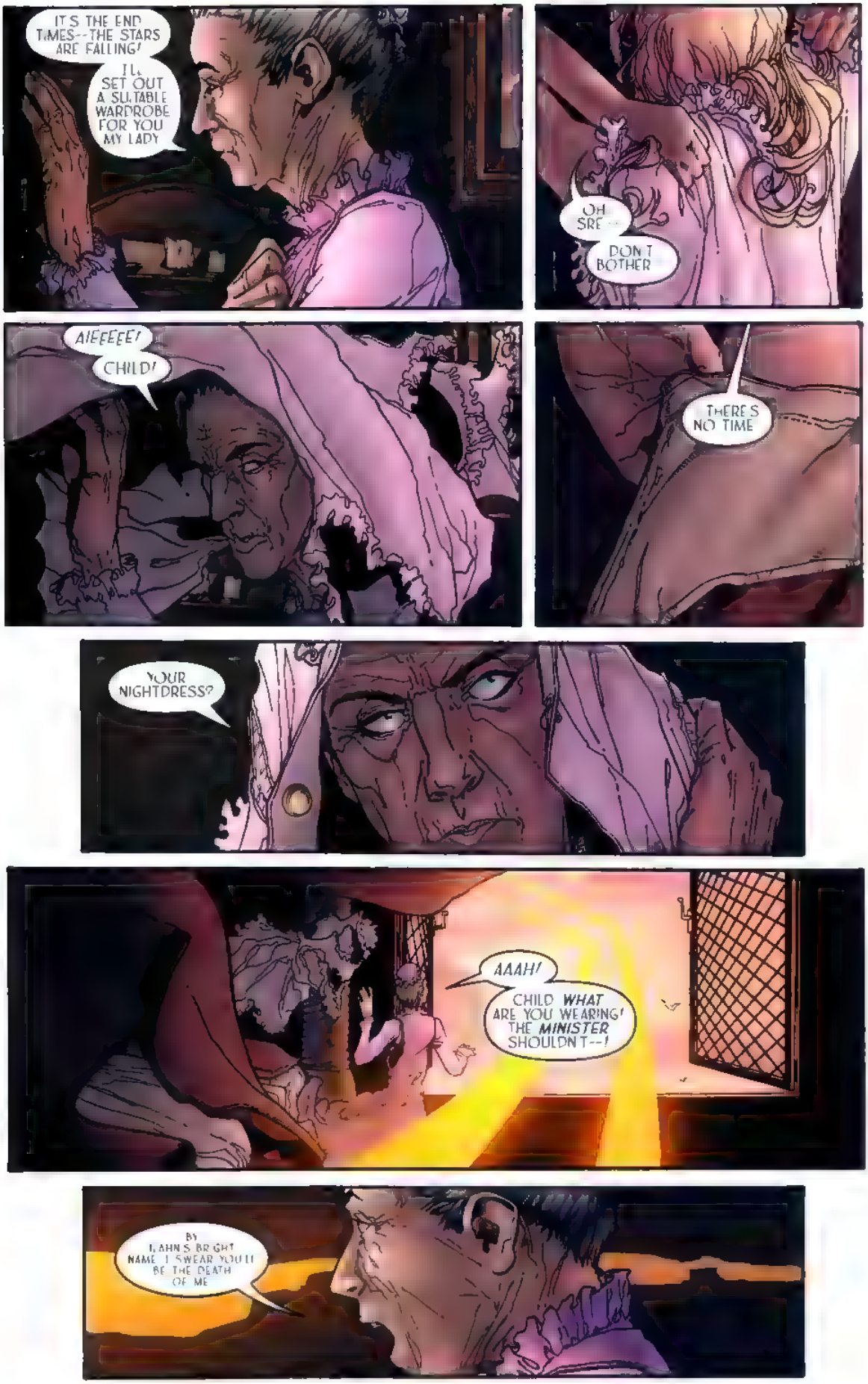
RRRPPPPT


CADADOR DROPPED TOBEL INTO THE OCEAN

AND CADADOR WILL PAY
AGAIN, BOY EVEN IF WE WOULD, WE CANNOT LEND YOU A SHIP BECAUSE ALL BUT OUR LAST BE OUT ON THE WAVES OF WIND!
I REGRET THAT HYGBER AND NEHI SET SAIL NOT KNOWING YE'D RECOVER OR THEY MIGHT'VE DROPPED YOU HOME T'MERIDIAN
THEY'LL BE BACK WHEN THEY'VE FILLED THEIR STORES IN A WEEK OR SO
WHY DON'T THEY FISH CLOSER TO HOME?
THE WATERS HAVE ALL GONE DARK

WHAT FISH LIVE IN 'EM AIN FIT T EAT
THE BAY'S STILL GOOD BUT--
--IT'S *OURS* NO LONGER
YEAH, WE'VE SEEN THE SPREAD OF TOXIC TIDE FROM UP ABOVE IT'S SICKENING
T'S *DYING*, WHAT T'S
ALWAYS BEEN, BUT IT SEEMS TO BE SPOILING *FASTER* THESE DAYS
AN THE CREATURE'S BECOME HUNGR'IER AS IT HAS
SOON THERE'LL BE A DAY OF NO FISH, AND THAT'LL BE THE END OF US
FISHERFOLK'LL BE A FORGOTTEN BREED, JAD
FORGOTTEN
LIKE *ME*
I GUESS SEPHIE MUST BE TOO BUSY TO COME LOOK FOR ME
RIDAH I'VE JUST *GOT* TO GET *HOME*

I'M SURE SHE'S WORRIED SICK ABOUT ME!
MMM?
TWAGGGGH
UM?
MISTRESS SEPHIE!
CAN'T I EVER SLEEP?
WHAT IS IT
STARS ABOVE!
GET UP, CHILD!
AAAH... MY MINISTER THAT IS
THAT'S NOT A SEEMLY POSE FOR THE MINISTER TO ASS- ME I WOULD ADD
TWAGGGGH
THANK YOU SEE


IT'S THE END TIMES--THE STARS ARE FALLING!
I'LL SET OUT A SUITABLE WARDROBE FOR YOU MY LADY
OH SRE--
DON'T BOTHER
AIEEEEE!
CHILD!
THERE'S NO TIME
YOUR NIGHTDRESS?
AAAH!
CHILD WHAT ARE YOU WEARING! THE MINISTER SHOULDN'T--!
BY I, AHN'S BRIGHT NAME I SWEAR YOU'LL BE THE DEATH OF ME

WHO ARE YOU?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
AND HOW DID YOU LAY HANDS ON THAT SHIP?
Loyalty's cousin, responsibility, drives us to acts we might never otherwise contemplate
Yet find perfectly sensible in the moment

EXPLAIN YOURSELVES!
WHA—?
YOU'RE FROM
TORBEL
YES, TORBEL
THE MINISTER OF CAPADOR STOLE OUR HOME FROM US! WE DEMAND LIKE FOR LIKE — CAPADOR ITSELF IS THE PRICE FOR OUR LOSS!
HEAR ME, NEW MINISTER OF CAPADOR — WE DEMAND YOUR ISLAND!
AND WHILE YOU MAY HAVE THE POWER TO STOP US
DO YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO DO SO?

responsibility
choices
Decisions decisions, decisions!
THEREFORE AS MINISTER OF CAPADOR I ADVISE MY ADVISORS TO COMPLY WITH MY SUGGESTION
WE GIVE THE TORBELLIANS HESPERIA AND CONTRACTS FOR BARTER FREE LABOR FOR THE NEXT TWO YEARS
AND ALL THE ORE THEY REQUIRE, OF COURSE!
THEY DEMAND CAPADOR
THEY'RE WITHIN THEIR RIGHTS TO DEMAND THE ISLAND BUT I SUSPECT THEY'D BE CONTENT WITH OWNING THEIR OWN
I CAN DELIVER HESPERIA WITHOUT YOUR CONSENT, BUT I REQUIRE YOUR COOPERATION TO ISSUE CONTRACTS
THE AIRSHIP THEY COMMAND WAS BUILT BY SOMEONE AS POWERFUL AS ME
ITS WEAPON THE CANNON YOU'VE HEARD MAKING STRIKES AGAINST OUR HULL KNOWS NO PEER IN DESTRUCTIVE FORCE
GIVE ME YOUR ASSENT QUICKLY BEFORE THERE IS NO CAPADOR TO RISK WHILE NEGOTIATING
NATURALLY THE SEARCH FOR A HUSBAND FOR ME WILL HAVE TO BE SET ASIDE UNTIL THIS CRISIS IS RESOLVED
HMMPFH
WE'LL HAVE TO CONSIDER THIS MATTER CAREFULLY
CAPADOR, AS YOU WELL KNOW HAS NEVER BOWED TO PIRATES
FINE

YOU GO *THINK*. JUST REMEMBER THAT A GIANT WEAPON OF *DEATH* FILLS THE SKIES OF CADADOR!
WHAT'S TAKING SO LONG?
WE'VE GIVEN HER AMPLE TIME
TOO MUCH TIME!
THEY WON'T CONSIDER US SERIOUSLY UNTIL THEY'VE ALSO BEEN HURT
FIRE
BOOOOM

THAT WASN'T THE HULL
THEY'VE STRUCK THE CITY!
THIS IS THE PRICE OF YOUR DELAY!
I'LL LET YOU KNOW HOW DEAR THE COST OF YOUR THINKING IS IN CADADORIAN LIVES!
YOU'VE GOT THEM SQUIRMING GOOD JOB
GOOD?
DEREN, WHEN THIS CITY IT'S PEOPLE ARE BEING ATTACKED?
I'M NOT DOING
RUNNER! GO TO THE WESTERN EXCHANGE SPIRE AND AWAIT A MESSAGE FROM ME!

HURRY!
YES, MY MINISTER!
From birth, I have known my path led to the Ministry
that I would eventually assume responsibility for my island
Strange how "my island" was now Cadador
and doing well by her meant letting her bleed
HOLD YOUR FIRE!
FIRE AGAIN!
KA-CHOOOM

Iiahn's irresponsible decision to withhold ore from Torbel cost so many lives
Cadador would never understand what Torbel had experienced, never live up to their responsibility to make it right without, as the Torbellian had said, like for like
Blood for blood
Still, I was allowing their attack to continue
Did I have that right?
RUNNER!
GO TO THE COUNCIL WITH THIS WARNING --
TELL THEM I NEED THEIR AGREEMENT SOON!
I--I MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO STOP EVERY CANNONBALL!
YES, MY MINISTER!

OH, STOP
I... YOU'VE
MADE YOUR
POINT
Standing strong for one's city is a virtue
until such loyalty means confronting problems with blind force
creating lots of noise
but leaving nothing but dust

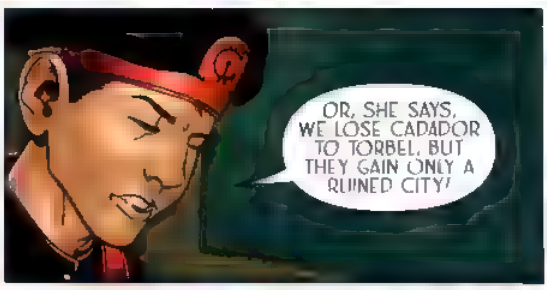
Diplomacy is a harder road.
its progress measured in agreements, not casualties
but there are times when no progress can be made without a mixture of the two
Wily bargaining, bargaining lives with your wiles
Papa's desire for peace, I was discovering, could not always be achieved through words
THERE! THE PAIN SHOULD STOP SHORTLY
WHY DON'T YOU SHOW THEM SOME PAIN!
TEAR THAT SHIP FROM THE SKY!
THOSE PEOPLE SHOULD DIE FOR ATTACKING CADADOR!
THE PEOPLE ON THAT SHIP ARE FROM TORBEL
THEY'VE ALREADY BEEN TORN FROM THE SKY ONCE.

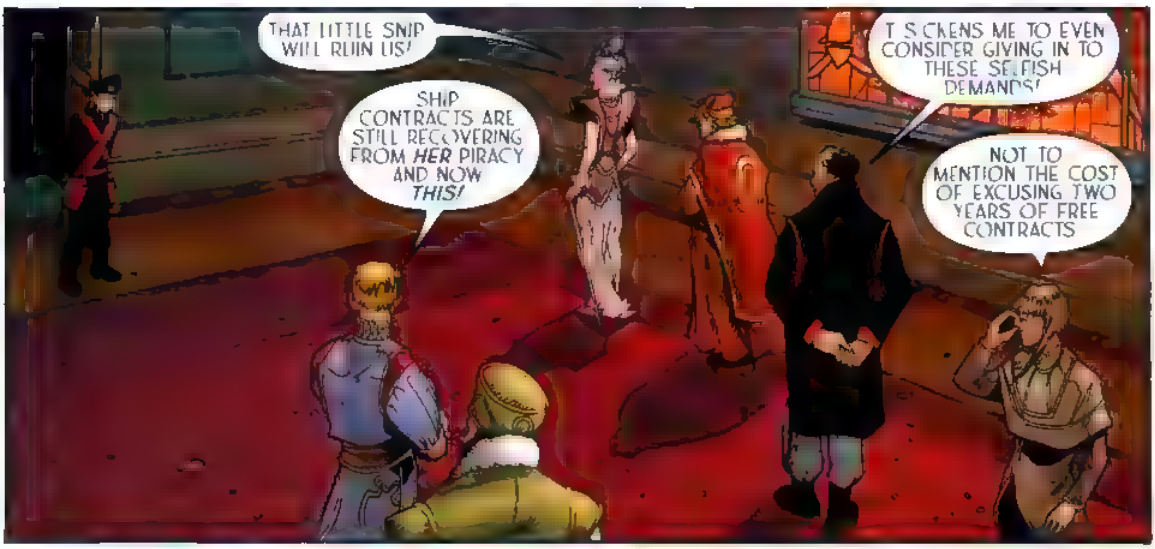
MINISTER SEPHIE!
THE COUNCIL REPORTS THAT THEY ARE WILLING TO CEDE HESPERIA AND SOME EQUIPMENT, BUT NO CONTRACTS
THAT'S UNFORTUNATE
Hahn said that negotiation is a game played by adults who pretend that what they do is not play
THANK YOU, RUNNER
TELL THEM THEY'D BETTER PREPARE TO LOSE CADADOR, THEN
I was getting caught up in the siege, in danger of forgetting how to play
I'M GETTING WEARY AND THEIR AIRSHIP HAS NO LIMIT TO ITS WEAPONS POWER
TELL THEM IF THEY RESIST, NO ONE WINS
But a little diplomacy
in the form of the truth, if not the whole truth
and a little power would end this game
WE LOSE CADADOR TO TORBEL BUT THEY GAIN ONLY A RUINED CITY
NOW, GO!
YES MY MINISTER!

WHO HERE SPEAKS FOR TORBEL?
I DO
IT S MY ATTACK YOU DEFENDED SO IF YOU NEED A LEADER TO BLAME ..

SHUT UP AND *LISTEN*
I SYMPATHIZE WITH YOUR LOSS, BUT YOU *MUST* SHOW SOME RESTRAINT SO I CAN WIN OVER THE COUNCIL!

YOU *KNOW* WHERE THEY MEET, DON T YOU?


OR, SHE SAYS, WE LOSE CAPADOR TO TORBEL, BUT THEY GAIN ONLY A RUINED CITY!

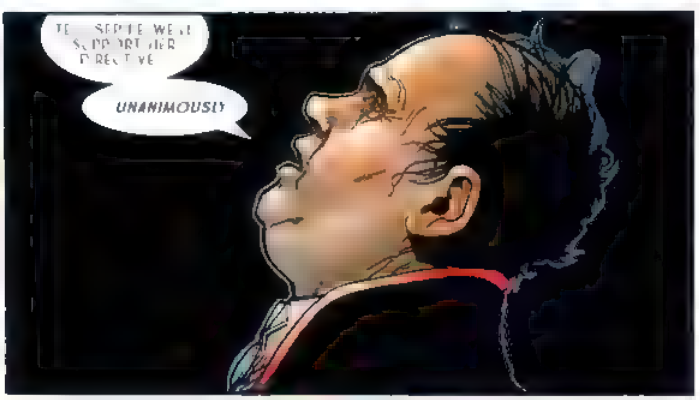

THAT LITTLE SNIP WILL RUIN US!
SHIP CONTRACTS ARE STILL RECOVERING FROM *HER* PIRACY AND NOW *THIS!*
T S CKENS ME TO EVEN CONSIDER GIVING IN TO THESE SELFISH DEMANDS!
NOT TO MENTION THE COST OF EXCUSING TWO YEARS OF FREE CONTRACTS

WHAT S THAT *SOUND* ?

I'VE HEARD IT TOO MUCH TODAY--
RUN!
CREEEK
It frightens me to think I am applying Hahn's teachings

OH
MY

ESTEEMED COUNCILORS!
SHALL I RETURN A RESPONSE?


UNANIMOUSLY

I'M CERTAIN THAT *THAT* WILL MAKE THE COUNCIL RECONSIDER THEIR REFUSAL
I'M *ASTOUNDED* THAT YOU HAVE SUCH FINE CONTROL
I'M ASTOUNDED THAT YOU WOULD DO THAT TO YOUR OWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS
I TOLD YOU I WAS SYMPATHETIC I'M ALSO A LITTLE IMPATIENT
HMMM
SEPHIE, YOU'RE ACTING MORE LIKE YOUR *UNCLE* EVERY DAY
HOW INTERESTING
WHY REESHA

GET BACK YOU!
OH?

HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN MY TOUCH SO SOON?

BUT THEN, IT'S NOT THE OLD MAN'S TOUCH YOU REMEMBER IS IT?
ILAHN!

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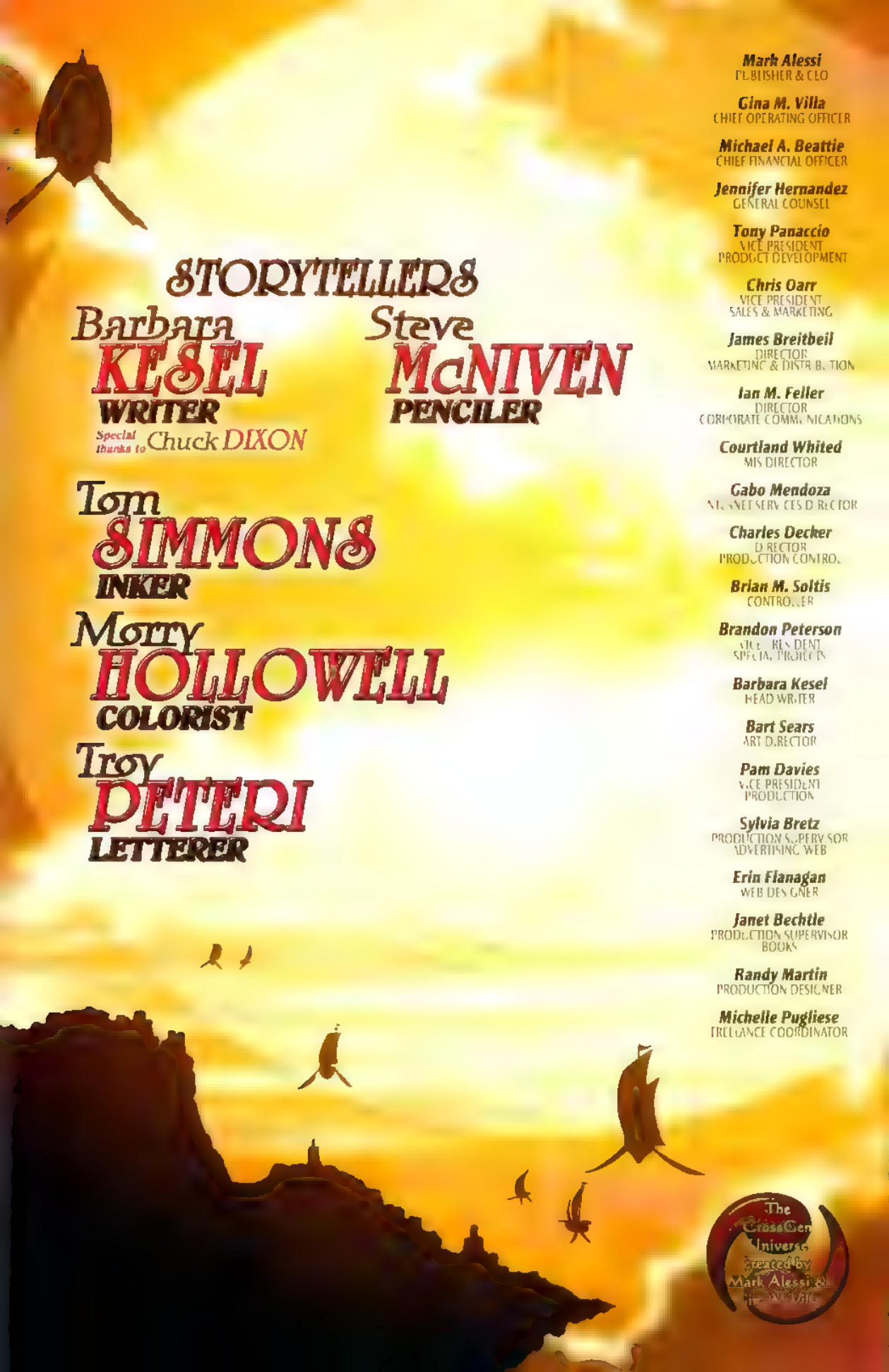

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MERIDIAN
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One of these islands is Meridian, home of shipbuilders and Sephie. Sephie has become the Minister of Meridian after her father Turos' death. Her uncle Ilahn is the Minister of the rich city-state of Cadador, which controls most of the shipping and trade on Demetria.

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Refugees from the island of Torbel, destroyed by Ilahn's callous decision, tried to claim Cadador in repayment. Sephie negotiated a settlement: the Torbellians were to be given a new island and promises of work. Sephie is left believing that she can now get on with the business of governing Cadador, but her method of negotiation has angered the Cadadorian council. They will do anything to get rid of their new Minister.

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CGE

I had become the Minister of Cadador through fraud, claiming to have killed a man I know to be alive
My uncle, Ilahn
My lie a heavy weight the ship of my spirit might have sunk if not buoyed by the certainty that the two islands I governed and the world I had vowed to protect were best served by my deceit
I was becoming adept at the business of telling untruths
Navigating a course of lies makes for an uncomfortable journey

My jaw tightening with the strain, I held the tongue that longed to protest the travesty of honoring the former Minister's death when he wasn't

So the new Minister of Cadador quietly led the solemn procession to the rim of Cadador

offering up a blessing as mock ashes were scattered to the winds

and choking on the lie of it

I prayed Papa would understand

WITH THIS ACT THE SIGNING OF THE PRONOUNCEMENT OF DEATH, THE NEW MINISTER OF CADADOR RELEASES THE OLD TO THE STARS
AND THUS CADADOR CONTINUES
SO BE IT
All this show for a man who wasn't dead
and no honoring of Sad a hero who was
My signature the final witness to my willing participation in this charade
Shame threatened to burn the ink dry before I could seal my name to the document, but
STOP!
S-STOP?
WHY?
It was not my inaction that stopped me

THE MINISTER OF MERIDIAN MAY NOT SIGN
SHE LACKS THE AUTHORITY TO DO SO
SHE IS NOT THE MINISTER OF CAPADOR
BOSCAU!
WHAT KIND OF CLERK'S AMUSEMENT IS THIS?
YOU'VE LET YOUR SORROW AT ILAHN'S DEATH PROMPT YOU TO OVERSTEP YOUR AUTHORITY.
I AM ILAHN'S BROTHER'S ONLY CHILD
YOU KNOW ILAHN HAS NO HEIR BUT ME
THIS IS NEITHER THE TIME NOR THE PLACE TO MAKE RIDICULOUS STATEMENTS LIKE
YOU ARE NOT THE MINISTER OF CAPADOR, SEPHIE OF MERIDIAN
I AM!

ALL OF CADAPOR IS MINE BY LAHN'S DIRECT AND LEGAL ORDER
SINCE LAST NIGHT
LAHN? WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?
JUST COME ALONG MY DEAR
PLEASE SIGN THIS DOCUMENT LADY TERAMO
DO AS THE MAN ASKS REESHA
HAVE A SURPRISE FOR SEPHE BUT IT REQUIRES YOUR ASSISTANCE
SHE'S TAKEN OVER CADAPOR! WHAT WILL A CERTIFICATE DO TO HINDER HER NOW?
READ

IN THE EVENT OF
ILAHN?
THIS STATES THAT I AGREE TO VOLUNTARILY ABDICATE THE MINISTRY OF CADADOR?
YES
I OWE SEPHIE A FULL MEASURE OF PAIN FOR THE TROUBLE SHE'S CAUSED ME
FOR THE TIME BEING I WILL BE ABLE TO MOVE MORE FREELY AND CAUSE GREATER TURMOIL TO SEPHIE'S PLANS IF I REMAIN DEAD.
I FAIL TO FOLLOW
HOW DOES MY ABDICATION OF A MINISTRY I DON'T HAVE HELP YOU TO DAMAGE SEPHIE'S MISSION?
JUST SIGN THE PAPER AND HAVE A LITTLE FAITH IN ME
VERY WELL.
DONE!
SO CERTIFIED AND ENTERED INTO RECORD. MY MINISTRY
GOOD GOOD

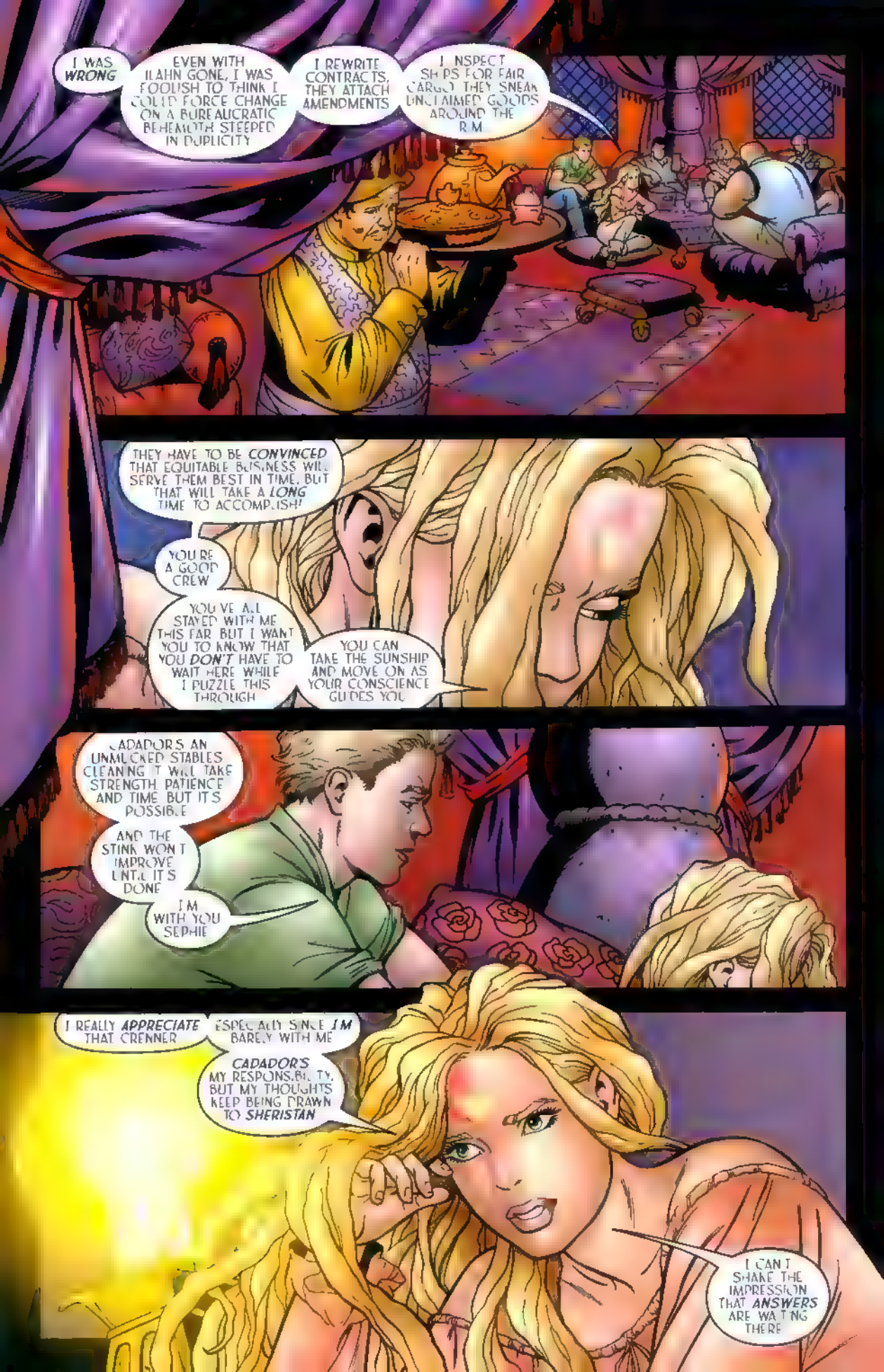
THANK YOU, MY DEAR
NOW SIGN THIS ONE
OH! I SEE NOW
THIS ONE NAMES ME YOUR HEIR
AND MINISTER OF CADADOR IN THE CASE OF YOUR DISAPPEARANCE OR DEATH
ILAHN, YOU DIDN'T TRUST ME TO SIGN THIS ONE FIRST?
I KNOW YOU TOO WELL FOR THAT, DON'T I?
I'LL LET THAT PASS
Reesha
Ilahn
WELCOME TO MY MINISTRY BOSCALI
WHEN DOES THIS BECOME OFFICIAL?
WHY IT WAS SIGNED AND CERTIFIED SIX MONTHS AGO, LADY REESHA
DID YOU NOT NOTE THE DATE?
I'VE BEEN SLOPPY IN MY RECALL OF IMPORTANT RECORDS, THE RESULT OF MY SHOCK AND GRIEF AT MINISTER ILAHN'S DEATH
MY APOLOGIES MY EGREGIOUS OVERSIGHT WILL BE SWIFTLY RECTIFIED

NOW, LAHN
TELL ME
HOW DID YOU ESCAPE MERIDIAN?
PEOPLE SAW YOU DIE!
THEY WITNESSED MY AGONY, INDEED
SEPHIE'S TOUCH CAUSED ME GREAT PAIN BUT AS YOU CAN SEE, THE YOUTHFUL RESULT IS PLEASURABLE
I'M NOT ENTIRELY CERTAIN OF THE MECHANISM OF MY CONVEYANCE
IT WAS AS IF, AT THE MOMENT OF CERTAIN DEATH, I MELTED AWAY FROM THE REALM OF PHYSICAL EXISTENCE INTO THAT OF SPIRIT
I FIRST ASSUMED I HAD DIED AND WAS ON MY WAY TO THE STARS. BUT AS I THOUGHT LONGINGLY OF CADADOR, I FOUND MYSELF TRANSPORTED THERE
MUCH THE WAY RHO RHUSTANE BROUGHT THE TWO OF US TO ELYSIA!
ILAHN ARE YOU ALSO BECOMING A GOD? CAN YOU TRANSPORT YOURSELF IN THAT WAY AT WILL?
PARDON ME, MY MONSTERS. I HAVE DOCUMENTS TO FILE
I HAVE YET TO FIND THE KEY TO THIS METHOD OF INSTANTANEOUS TRAVEL BUT WITH DILIGENT PRACTICE, I AM CERTAIN THE CAPABILITY WILL SOON BE IN MY GRASP, AS WILL
ILAHN!

YOU SHIRKED YOUR DUTIES HERE SEPHE. ONCE YOU LEFT SAPADOR LAHN CHOSE A WI NG REPLACEMENT
THAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED
BRAZEN PRETENDER
COMPROMISE THAN
TRUE MINISTER? CAN THIS BE SO?
LET ME INSPECT THAT PARCHMENT BOSCAL!
HMMM

THIS CERTIFICATE OF SUCCESS ON
S GENUINE
REESHA TERAMU IS THE RIGHTFUL MINISTER OF CAPADOR!

WHA--?
YOU'RE JOKING!
THAT CAN'T BE REAL!
THE MINISTER OF MERIDIAN IS INVITED TO INSPECT MINISTER ILAHN'S LAST WISHES FOR HERSELF
SOMEBODY'S BEEN UP TO NO GOOD
WHAT AM I HEARING, DEREN? SEPHIE'S NOT THE REAL MINISTER?
I DON'T LIKE THIS SOMEBODY'S PLAYING HER
DOES THIS MEAN THAT ILAHN'S CRAWLED BACK FROM THE DEAD?
I DOUBT IT - WE'D HAVE HEARD
MAYBE SO. BUT IF SEPHIE'S NOT MINISTER THEN THERE'S NO REASON FOR US TO STAY ON THIS CORRUPTED ROCK ANY LONGER!
WE KNOW SEPHIE DOESN'T WANT TO BE HERE AFTER WHAT SHE SAID LAST NIGHT


I WAS *WRONG*
EVEN WITH ILAHN GONE, I WAS FOOLISH TO THINK I COULD FORCE CHANGE ON A BUREAUCRATIC BEHEMOTH STEEPED IN DUPLICITY
I REWRITE CONTRACTS, THEY ATTACH AMENDMENTS
I INSPECT SHIPS FOR FAIR CARGO THEY SNEAK UNCLAIMED GOODS AROUND THE R M
THEY HAVE TO BE *CONVINCED* THAT EQUITABLE BUSINESS WILL SERVE THEM BEST IN TIME. BUT THAT WILL TAKE A *LONG* TIME TO ACCOMPLISH!
YOU'RE A GOOD CREW
YOU'VE ALL STAYED WITH ME THIS FAR BUT I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT YOU *DON'T* HAVE TO WAIT HERE WHILE I PUZZLE THIS THROUGH
YOU CAN TAKE THE SUNSHIP AND MOVE ON AS YOUR CONSCIENCE GUIDES YOU
CADADOR'S AN UNMUCKED STABLES CLEANING IT WILL TAKE STRENGTH PATIENCE AND TIME BUT IT'S POSSIBLE
AND THE STINK WON'T IMPROVE UNTIL IT'S DONE
I'M WITH YOU SEPHIE
I REALLY *APPRECIATE* THAT CRENNER
ESPECIALLY SINCE *I'M* BARELY WITH ME
CADADOR'S MY RESPONSIBILITY, BUT MY THOUGHTS KEEP BEING DRAWN TO *SHERISTAN*
I CAN'T SHAKE THE IMPRESSION THAT *ANSWERS* ARE WAITING THERE

SHERISTAN
COTSON THE MUSE OF GIATAN
SHE SAID SOMETHING ABOUT THAT PLACE
HONDELL SAYS A FEW THINGS WHEN THE SPIRITS MOVE HIM, TOO, BUT I DON'T GO CHASING OFF AFTER MYSTERIES ON THAT ACCOUNT
SHERISTANS A CHILDREN'S STORY NOT A REAL PLACE
MAYBE SHERISTAN DOESN'T EXIST BUT MOST PEOPLE DON'T KNOW ANHEIM EXISTS EITHER
WHAT IF THERE ARE PEOPLE HIDDEN IN A DESERT CITY WORKING ON PROJECTS EQUIVALENT TO ANHEIM'S TOXIN ELIMINATING CROPS?
SHOULDN'T WE FIND OUT?
COME ON, SERPIE LOAD UP YOUR SHIP AND RUN AWAY FROM CADADOR!
ISN'T THAT WHAT YOU'RE DOING NOW?
BUT...
HAVE TO STAY ON CADADOR WHERE NOTHING WILL EVER CHANGE EXCEPT YOU AFTER THEY FIND YOU A HUSBAND TO MAKE BABY MINISTERS WITH TYING YOU TO HERE AND THEM
YOUR MOTHER NEVER LET HER STAND AFTER SHE HAD YOU.
IF YOU FOLLOW THAT TRAIL WHO KNOWS WHERE?

MAYBE COMING TO CADADOR WAS A MISTAKE, BUT I MADE THE DECISION TO TAKE THE MINISTRY OF CADADOR
-AND UNTIL ILAHN COMES BACK TO TAKE THAT AWAY FROM ME, I'VE *GOT* TO SEE IT THROUGH
SEPHIE GIVE IT SOME TIME
NO DECISION NEEDS TO BE MADE *TONIGHT*
WHO KNOWS WHAT TOMORROW MAY BRING?
TOMORROW
ILAHN'S MEMORIAL SERVICE
A *MOCKERY* OF A SACRED EVENT
YOU'VE GOT TO GO THROUGH WITH IT SEPH
AFTER ALL, I HEAR YOU *DID* KILL THE GUY
SIGH-
THERE'S *THAT*

I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU THINK YOU ARE. BUT YOU'RE NOT *REALLY* GOING TO TRY TO FORCE THE ISSUE AGAINST A BLOOD HEIR, ARE YOU?
YOU'VE *HEARD* WHAT I DID TO *ILAHN*?
BUT I *MUST*
IT'S NOT WHAT MINISTER ILAHN *WANTED*
ME, NOT *YOU*
OR WOULD YOU LIKE TO CHALLENGE ME FOR THE RIGHT TO RULE CAPADOR
TEST *YOUR* POWER AGAINST *MINE*?

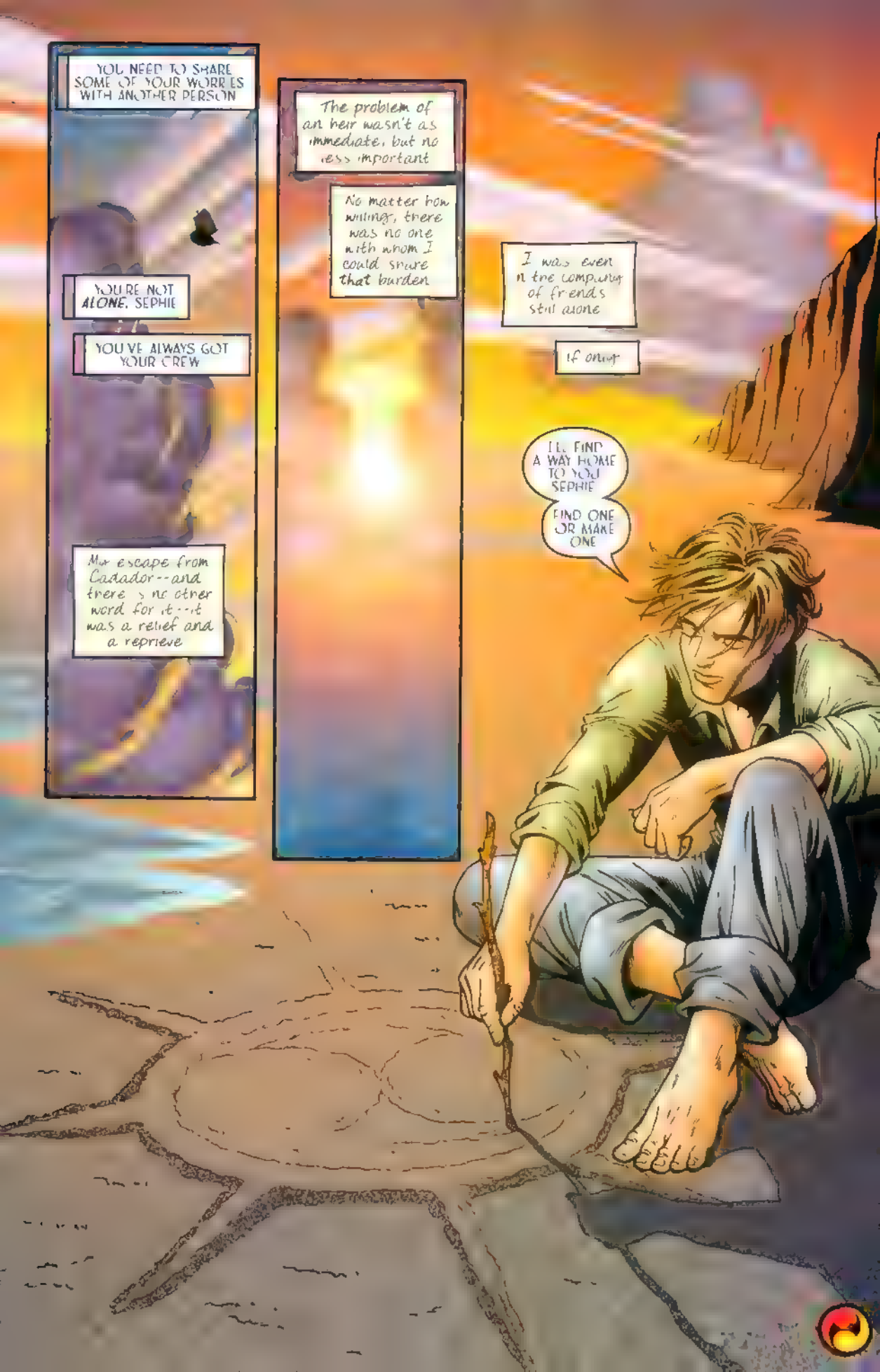
THAT POWER... YOU!
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO KILLED JAD!
AND YOU ARE THE ONE WHO KILLED ILAHN!
BUT...
IF YOU THINK THAT...
THEN HE'S NOT THE ONE WHO...
HE'S...
HE'S NO HERE
I...
I CAN'T DO THIS
I CAN'T FIGHT YOU FOR A CITY THAT ISN'T MINE
NOT AND RISK THEM

REESHA TERAMO
ACCEPT THE VERITY OF YOUR CLAIM
I'M NOT SURE I HEARD YOU. DO I UNDERSTAND YOU TO SAY THAT YOU ACCEPT THAT I AM THE TRUE MINISTER OF CAPADOR?
YES
THEN YOU, SEPHIE OF MERIDIAN, ARE HEREBY BANISHED FROM CAPADOR FOR THE MURDER OF HER FORMER MINISTER
YOU WILL LEAVE THE ISLAND IMMEDIATELY

WHAT A MARVELOUS EVENT. AND IT PROCEEDED EXACTLY AS PLANNED
LOROSI!
LOROSI, DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME CALL?
COME. WE MUST DISCUSS TOMORROW'S SCHEDULE
PLEASE, BOSCAJ IF THERE'S ANY HOPE OF ANOTHER HEIR TELL ME!
THERE'S MORE LIKELIHOOD OF MINISTER LAHN'S RETURN THAN THAT
NNNNGH
LOROSI!
DON'T RUN FROM ME LOROSI
I'M ABOUT TO BECOME THE MOST FAMOUS MINISTER CADAPOR HAS EVER KNOWN

YOU WOULDN'T WANT TO TURN TAIL NOW!
WHAT'S THE BOOK, SEPH?
SOMETHING ILAHN SHOULD *NEVER* HAVE HAD AND THAT NO NEW MINISTER OF CADADOR WILL EVER TOUCH
THE *ONLY* THING I WANTED TO TAKE WITH ME FROM THAT ISLAND
EXCEPT FOR THE KNOWLEDGE YOU'VE GAINED THAT CHANGE CAN'T COME OVERNIGHT, AND IT CAN'T COME FROM CADADOR!
EXACTLY!
IT WI... COME FROM *EXCLUDING* CADADOR!

SO WHERE ARE WE HEADED SEPHIE?
MERIDIAN?
YES, BUT WITH TWO STOPS BEFORE
I WAS THINKING ABOUT THE TORBELLANS AND THE CHALLENGES FACING THEM ON THEIR NEW ISLAND
THERE'S GOT TO BE A WAY TO HELP THEM PROSPER
THEN THERE'S A PROMISE I MADE AND INTEND TO KEEP
AND THERE MAY BE A WAY TO INTERTWINE THE TWO
THAT'S THE ALBUM OF YOUR MOTHER'S PAINTINGS?
WILL YOU BE SHARING HER ART WITH THE REST OF US?
AAAAH CRENNER, I
IT'S KIND OF PRIVATE
OH, LIKE A DIARY
THAT'S FINE
THANK YOU FOR BEING SO UNDERSTANDING CRENNER
SEPHIE, YOU NEVER KNEW YOUR MOTHER
YOU'RE ENTITLED TO KEEP PART OF HER TO YOURSELF
JUST DON'T KEEP EVERYTHING INSIDE


YOU NEED TO SHARE SOME OF YOUR WORRIES WITH ANOTHER PERSON
YOU'RE NOT ALONE, SEPHIE
YOU'VE ALWAYS GOT YOUR CREW
My escape from Cadador--and there's no other word for it--it was a relief and a reprieve
The problem of an heir wasn't as immediate, but no less important
No matter how willing, there was no one with whom I could share that burden
I was even in the company of friends still alone
If only
I'LL FIND A WAY HOME TO YOU SEPHIE
FIND ONE OR MAKE ONE

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Far away on the world of Demetria,

explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

One of these islands is Meridian, home of shipbuilders and Sephie. Sephie has become the Minister of Meridian after her father Turos' death. Her uncle Ilahn is the Minister of the rich city-state of Cadador, which controls most of the shipping and trade on Demetria.

A mysterious force has endowed both Sephie and Ilahn with power – opposing forces – Ilahn's destruction versus Sephie's renewal.

Ilahn wants to control Sephie – and Meridian – but Sephie has been fighting to resist Ilahn's control of herself and Demetria's commerce. The conflict between them erupts into a battle, during which Ilahn disappears... apparently dead at Sephie's hands.

Sephie departs for Cadador to establish her rule in Ilahn's absence. She is not greeted with open arms, but after a show of power, is granted a grudging respect. Political wheels turn, however, and Cadador's councilors side with Reesha Teramu, Ilahn's paramour, when Reesha shows up with a document proclaiming her Ilahn's chosen heir and, consequently, the true Minister of Cadador. Reesha is also the woman whose powers led to Jad's death, but Sephie accepts her claim to the Ministry to avoid a battle between them.

Banished from Cadador, an out-of-sorts Sephie and the crew of the sunship begin the next phase of their journey...

Meridian® Vol. 1 Issue 32 FEBRUARY 2003 FIRST PRINTING Published by CG Entertainment, Inc. Office of publication: 4023 Tampa Road, Suite 2400 Oldsmar Florida 34677 **Meridian®**, **CrossGen®**, **CrossGen Comics®** CrossGeneration®, **CrossGeneration Comics®** and the **CrossGen sigil®** are registered trademarks of CrossGeneration Comics, Inc. The CG **Entertainment logo™** and all prominent **Meridian®** characters and images are Trademark and Copyright 2003 CrossGeneration Comics, Inc. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. The stories, incidents and characters in this publication are fictional. Any similarities to persons, living or dead, are purely coincidental. With the exception of artwork used for review purposes, none of the contents of this book may be reproduced in any form without the express written consent of CrossGeneration Comics, Inc. PRINTED IN CANADA.

YOU DON'T HAVE ME YET
IT'S A MATTER OF SKILL
NOT SIZE
WHAKK
UNNGH!

YOU'RE GOOD. YOU ALMOST GAINED THE ADVANTAGE

KRAK

WHUMPF

KHWMP

pt

ALMOST

AAAAH!

DEREN!

WHAT ARE YOU—?

WHAT'S GOING ON?

GOOD WORK CRENNER, RASE RHYNE
NOW THAT YOU'RE FINALLY LEARNING
TAKE A REST
DEREN!
I CAPTAIN THIS SHIP TELL ME-
WHAT WERE YOU DOING TO THEM?
H A-HEY, SEPHIE
TEACHING THEM HOW TO FIGHT
WHY?
NO ONE'S GOING TO ATTACK THEM WHILE I'M AROUND
EXACTLY!
WHILE YOU'RE AROUND!
BUT YOU'RE NOT ALWAYS GOING TO BE WITH US, ARE YOU?
YOU CAN'T BE EVERYWHERE AND WE CAN'T DEPEND ON YOUR SIGIL TO PROTECT US
BY YOUR OWN TELLING, THAT THING APPEARED SUDDENLY
WHO SAYS IT CAN'T AS SUDDENLY DISAPPEAR?
WHA ?
BUT IT--
I
IT COULDN'T
IF IT DID
YES, WHAT IF IT DID?

DEREN - WHAT DID YOU MEAN BY THAT?
ARE YOU TRYING TO FRIGHTEN ME?
STOP WHINING, SEPHIE
YOU AND WE NEED TO BE PREPARED FOR ANYTHING
WE ARE DARING GREAT THINGS AND MAKING DEADLY ENEMIES
WE CAN'T TREAT THIS MISSION AS PLAY
WHO'S PLAYING? WHO JUST !
HEY, NOW, SEPH
YOU'RE ABOUT TO BLOW STEAM THROUGH YOUR EYES
TIME TO BACK OFF AND DAMP THAT FIRE BEFORE I HAVE TO DROP YOU INTO THE OCEAN TO COOL OFF
NO, SHE NEEDS TO BACK OFF!
DEREN'S JUST TRYING TO START A FIGHT WHERE WE DON'T NEED ONE!
AND WHY, DEREN?
WHAT DO YOU-
SEPH
I WARNED YOU
COTSON!
I am not a forceful captain

While one must be decisive, one must also be responsive to suggestions made by the crew
Seasoned sailors have wisdom to offer, but a green recruit may also lay fresh eyes on an old problem
Even so, all hands look to the captain for direction
Everyone suffers when the captain is out of sorts
CRENNER, DID YOU NOTICE HOW ANGRY IT MADE HER THAT YOU WERE THREATENED?
THAT'S JUST NATURAL
I'D BE ANGRY IF SHE WAS IN DANGER
IT DOESN'T MEAN ANYTHING
HMMM
COMING INSIDE?
UH NOT RIGHT NOW

I'd been cast aside by Cadador and was consequently difficult to abide
There was an anger inside me I'd known only once before
Too bad Ilahn had yet to make a reappearance
I was surly and dearly wanted to hit someone
Instead, I flew
until the waves of the wind had washed away most of my bad humor
Most
SEPHIE!
WELCOME BACK!
HOW WAS IT?
OH
WAS WHAT?
AFTER THAT SPECTACULAR LAUNCH
HAVE A GOOD FLIGHT?
VERY FUNNY
CRENNER
WILL YOU PLEASE LEAVE ME ALONE WITH MY THOUGHTS?
OH
UH FINE
No one spoke to me for the rest of that day

When new light dawned, it shone on a more tolerable captain
Midday brought us to our destination
Twice home to refugees, this island had first housed Meridian's rebels, who fled our island during the Cadadorian invasion
They named it Hesperia and tamed its wild shoals, determining a safe course through which to pilot ships, and erected the first of its shelters
They left it to return home and reclaim Meridian
The second set of refugees came after my uncle caused Torbel's fall. This island was gifted to the survivors--
People not content to leave nature be
Construction has moved swiftly since

It was clear that ore pods would soon be needed to bolster the extra mass of Hesperia's new residents--
Ironworkers and pod crafters eager to ply their trade and expand their holdings
QUIET, PLEASE!
HOW CAN WE
SHOULD NEVER HAVE LEFT
BETTER OFF ON MERIDIAN
IF ONLY
CALM YOURSELVES PEOPLE!
WE CAN'T LIVE LIKE THIS!
WE'VE ONLY
AH HULLO?
PARDON ME, MASTER EPTON
I DIDN'T MEAN TO INTERRUPT
MINISTER ESE CADADOR!
SINCE IT WAS YOU WHO CEDED HESPERIA TO TORBEL YOU SHOULD HAVE ENSURED THAT THE IS. AND WAS SOUND!
WE ARRIVED TO FIND NO MINISTRY LODGE, NO FOUNDRY--
IT'S PRIMITIVE!
CRUD
IT APPEARS MORE INVITING THAN THE OCEAN FLOOR WHERE TORBEL NOW LIES!
YOU HAVE MY SYMPATHY, BUT PLEASE ACCEPT THESE TRUTHS
TORBEL IS GONE
YOU HAD NO HOME
THIS ISLAND IS YOUR FUTURE
LOOK AT HOW QUICKLY YOU ARE MAKING IT YOUR OWN YOUR CHILDREN WILL KNOW NO OTHER HOME!
AND TO SPEED YOUR PROGRESS, I HAVE COME WITH A NEW WORK CONTRACT FOR YOU
WILL YOU HEAR IT?

THAT ONE SEE COTSON?
YES, I DO YOU'VE GOT *HIM* PEGGED OKAY YOU'RE RIGHT YOU'RE *ALWAYS* RIGHT
WHAT *ABOUT* THAT ONE?
OH, DEREN HERE'S MAKING THE ARGUMENT THAT IF WE TOUCH DOWN, THE NATIVES ARE LIKELY TO OVERPOWER US JUST TO GET OUT OF DOING SO MUCH WORK
ME, I THOUGHT THEY'D BE HAPPY SETTLING IN, BUT SHE'S GOT AN EYE FOR SPOTTING THE MA..CONTENTED
I VOTE WE STAY ALOFT UNTIL SEPHIE DRAGS US ALONG ON HER NEXT WHIM
SHERISTAN OUR NEXT STOP WILL BE THE DESERT CITY SHE'S CURIOUS AND SHE WON'T BE ABLE TO RESIST FOR LONG
NAH. THAT LITTLE GIRL'LL HAVE US RUNNING HOME TO MERIDIAN. WE'LL HAVE TO FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO WITH OURSELVES ONCE SHE SETTLES BACK INTO HER HOME ISLAND. MAYBE WE'LL SETTLE DOWN AND BE SHIPBUILDERS LIKE THEM
IT'S *MERIDIAN*, MARK MY WORDS
WRONG, AND *WRONG*. I HAVE A PROMISE TO KEEP AND NOW THAT I KNOW THE TORBELLIANS WILL COOPERATE LET'S *GO*!
OUR DESTINATION IS--

--AKASA!
SHIPS!
SHIPS!
SHIPS!

IT'S TRUE!
SHIPS!
THREE IN VIEW!
SHIPS!
SHIPS?
WHAT COLORS DO THEY FLY? WHERE ARE THEY FROM?
TWO FROM CADADOR, AND ONE UNKNOWN BUT ITS MARK IS THE SAME STRANGE SIGN WE SAW ON SEPHIE AND MINISTER ILAHN!
SEPHIE RENEWED OUR CITY BUT ILAHN DESTROYED MUCH OF IT--IS THIS NOW BOTH OF THEM IN LEAGUE?
WHY ARE THEY HERE? HAVEN'T THEY RUINED US ENOUGH?
OH, NO
PROTECT THE FACTORY!
I'd escaped Akasia and was now returning to a changed city, changed myself
The sight--and smell--of the dye factory where I'd been kept prisoner and its toxic underflow sent blood pounding through my veins
My heart raced, shame and fear vying for control

both lost to anger as my entrance echoed the turmoil I felt inside

all the hurt of being betrayed by Cadador, all the rage I felt at the injustice of children chained at this factory, all the excitement of being able to change it with a single act

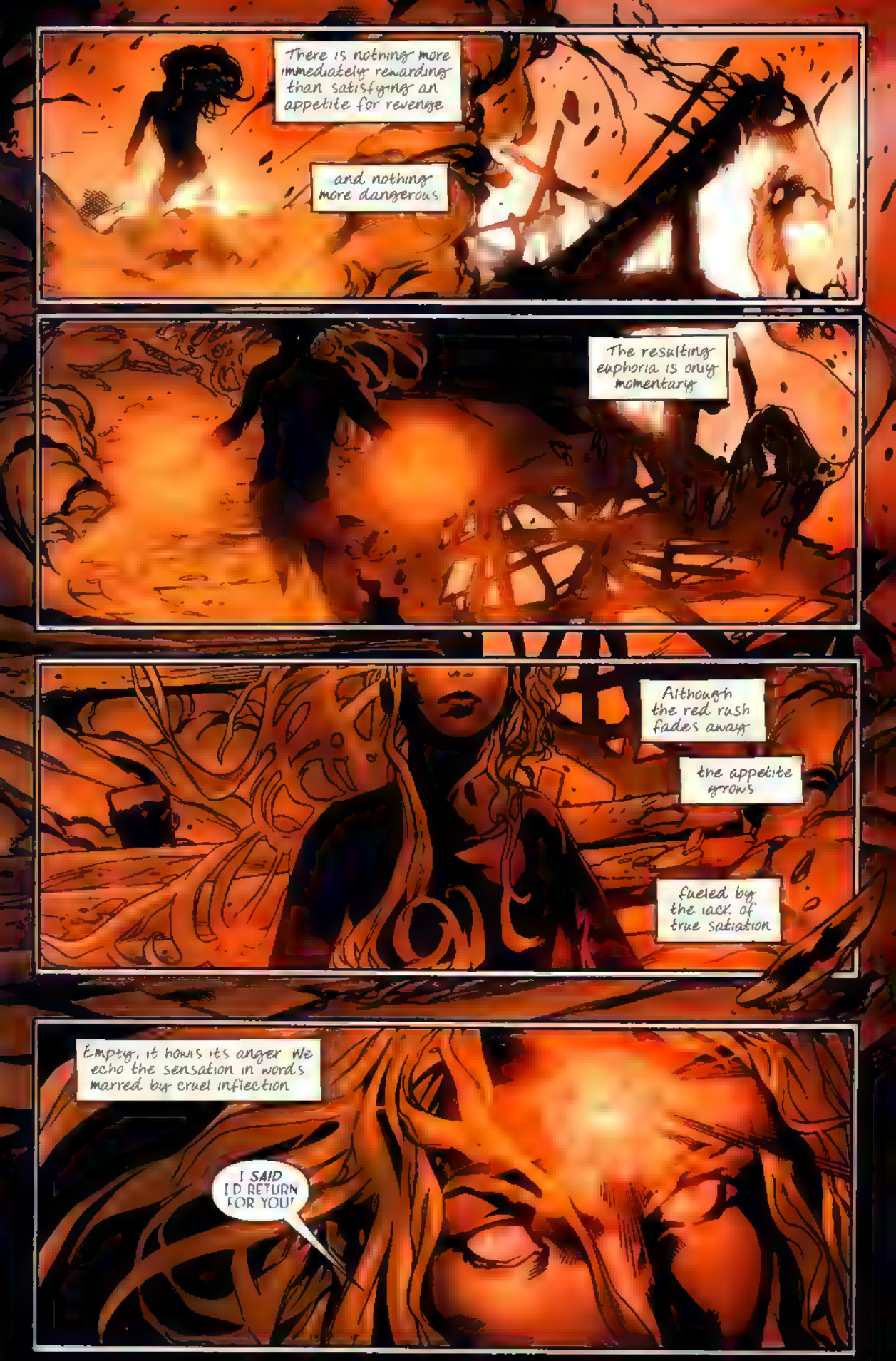
it all came flooding out

in a silly, self-indulgent show of power that I didn't have the presence of mind to avoid

I was too busy liking it

THAT RED FIRE -

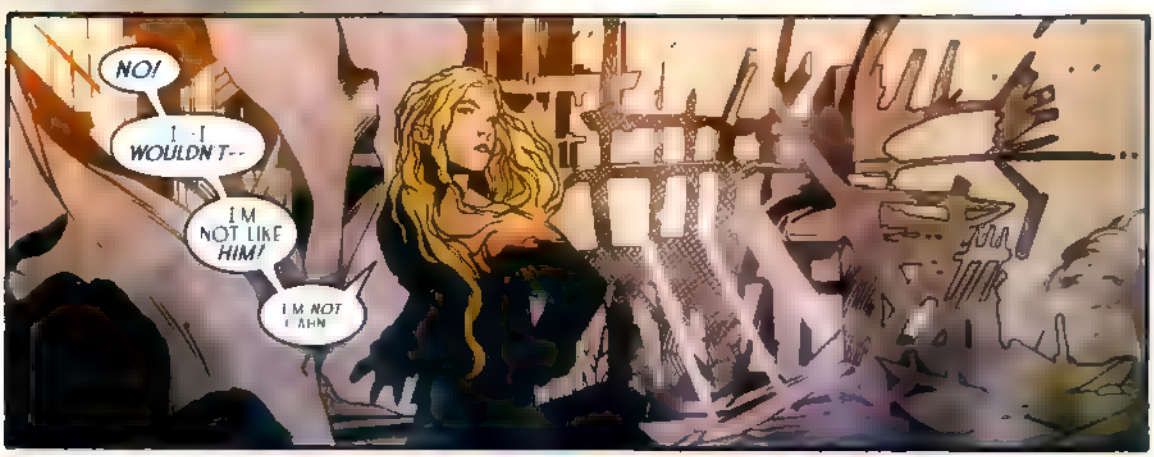
ILAHN'S RETURNED!

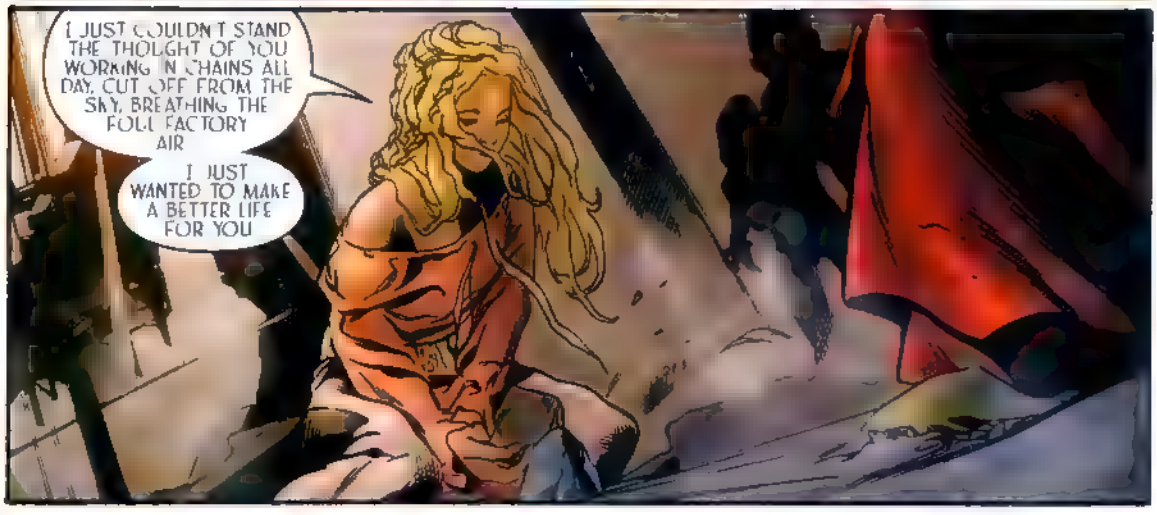

There is nothing more immediately rewarding than satisfying an appetite for revenge
and nothing more dangerous
The resulting euphoria is only momentary
Although the red rush fades away
the appetite grows
fueled by the lack of true satiation
Empty, it howls its anger. We echo the sensation in words marred by cruel inflection.
I SAID I'D RETURN FOR YOU!

MINISTER MARAYA! UNCHAIN THE CHILDREN!
NOW!

PLEASE DON'T HURT ME!
HURT YOU?
OH, NO! I WOULDN'T DO THAT!
I'M HERE TO FREE YOU TO TAKE YOU AWAY!
BUT YOU'RE SMASHING THINGS APART LIKE MINISTER ILAHN DID!
BUT I'M NOT ILAHN! I'M NOT LIKE HIM AT ALL! I JUST WANT TO TAKE YOU SOMEPLACE GOOD!
DON'T TOUCH ME! YOU'RE LYING! GO AWAY!
DON'T YOU WANT TO LIVE ON AN ISLAND WHERE YOU WON'T HAVE TO WORK IN CHAINS? I'VE COME TO TAKE YOU THERE!

LEAVE US ALONE!
WE DON'T WANT TO GO WITH YOU!
WE...VE HERE!
YOU'RE BREAKING THINGS!
BUT-- BUT--
IT'S TRUE THAT MAN BROKE THE BOATS AND NOW YOU BROKE THE FACTORY


NO!
I--I WOULDN'T--
I'M NOT LIKE HIM!
I'M NOT I AHN


I JUST COULDN'T STAND THE THOUGHT OF YOU WORKING IN CHAINS ALL DAY, CUT OFF FROM THE SKY, BREATHING THE FOUL FACTORY AIR
I JUST WANTED TO MAKE A BETTER LIFE FOR YOU

SEPHIE

DELIBERATE OR NOT, YOU'VE JUST DESTROYED THE LAST VESTIGE OF OUR FEEBLE ECONOMY YOU HAVE FINISHED WHAT ILAHN STARTED--YOU'VE *RUINED* AKASIA

THAT WASN'T MY INTEN--

TELL ME--*WHAT* DO YOU OFFER THEM?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

THIS ISLAND OF YOURS... WILL IT BE BETTER THAN WHAT THEY KNOW HERE?

I SO... PLEASE TAKE THEM WITH YOU... LIFE IN AKASIA WILL ONLY WORSEN

THAT'S JUST *IT*... YOU NO LONGER *NEED* CHILDREN TO RUN THIS FACTORY!

MASTER *EPTON* HAS COME WITH A TEAM FROM *TORBEL* TO INSTALL *MACHINES* THAT WILL DO THE WORK OF A *HUNDRED* CHILDREN!

AND TWO TRADE SHIPS FOR YOU TO SHARE

TORBEL WANTS TO REFILL THESE SHIPS WITH FURNITURE AND CLOTHING FROM YOU. YOU TWO WILL MAKE FINE LONG TERM TRADE PARTNERS, AND IT PUTS YOU BOTH A FIRST STEP AWAY FROM THE CADADORIAN ECONOMY

NOT ONLY WILL THE CHILDREN BE WELCOME, BUT THEY *NEED* MORE PEOPLE. ALL THE ORPHANS YOU HOUSE HERE, THE ONES YOU'LL NO LONGER NEED TO DO THIS TERRIBLE LABOR, THEY CAN GO JOIN FAMILIES IN THE SKY!

CHILDREN... WILL YOU BE *BRAVE* FOR ME?

I WANT YOU TO *GO* WITH SEPHIE. LET HER TAKE YOU UP TO THE WONDERFUL ISLAND. YOU CAN LIVE BETTER UP THERE

WE CAN'T ALL LEAVE
YOU GAVE US A HOME. YOU DID YOUR BEST. AKASIA NEEDS CHILDREN TOO
I'LL STAY HERE
WILL YOU? THANK YOU DOAHN
HESPERIA WILL BE A GOOD PLACE FOR YOU
IF IT ISN'T
I'LL FIND A BETTER PLACE
AKASIA WILL SURVIVE. MINISTER MARAYA TORBEL WILL HELP MAKE SURE OF IT. YOU'RE THE FIRST PARTNERS IN A BRAND NEW ECONOMY AND NO ONE WILL GET IN OUR WAY!
NO ONE
FASCINATING
SHOW ME HOW THIS WORKS

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Thanks to June Brigman for layout assist on the cover and pages 1-7.

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Their journey takes them to Hesperia, where the ironworkers of fallen Torbel have relocated. Sephie offers them a trade deal with the city of Akasia, where Sephie was once held prisoner in the dye factories. Her return to Akasia is explosive, as she destroys the factory to free the children for a new life on Hesperia. Machines crafted by the Torbellians will replace their labor.

Meanwhile, Sephie's first love, Jad, is stranded on the surface...

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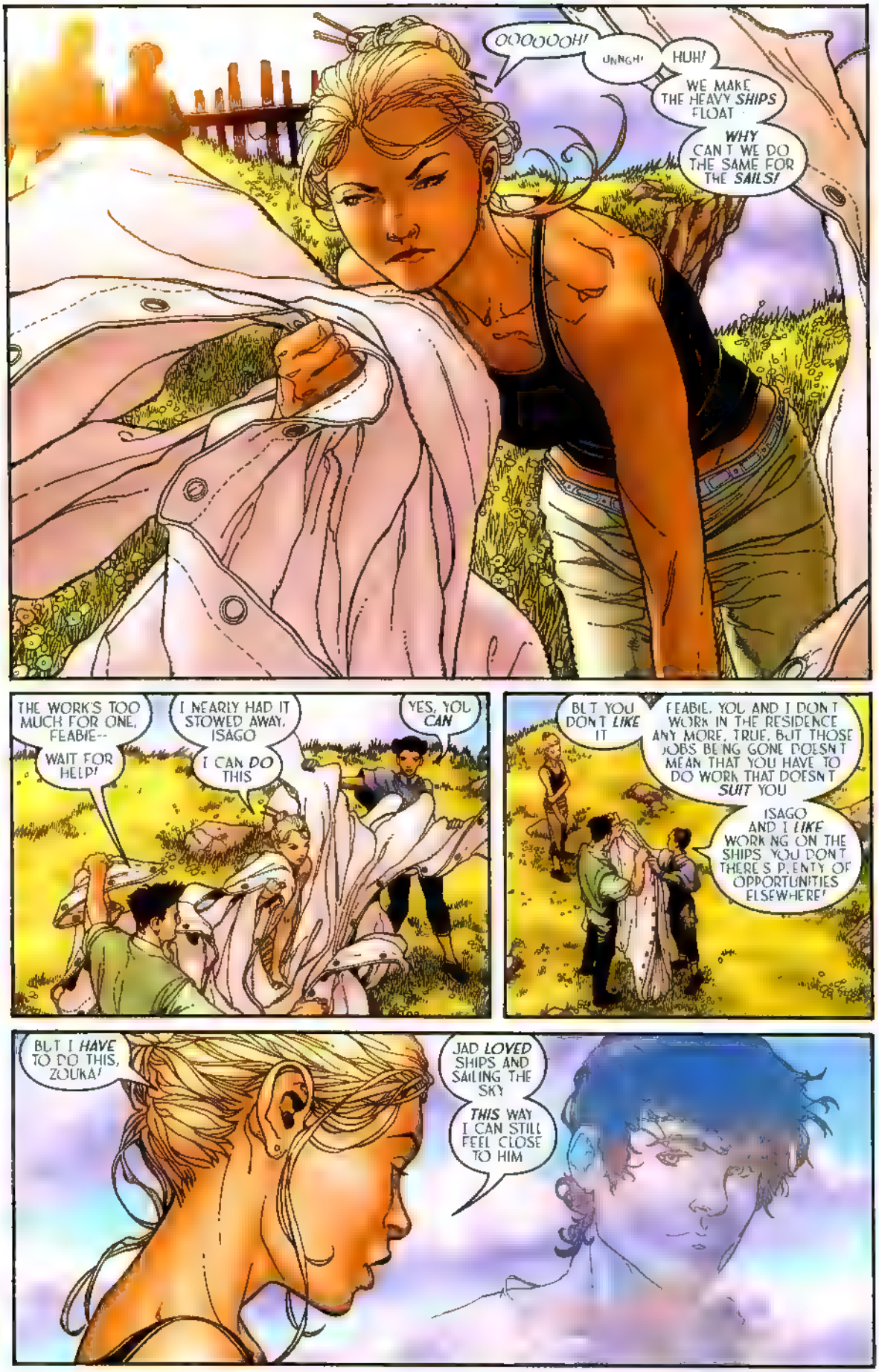
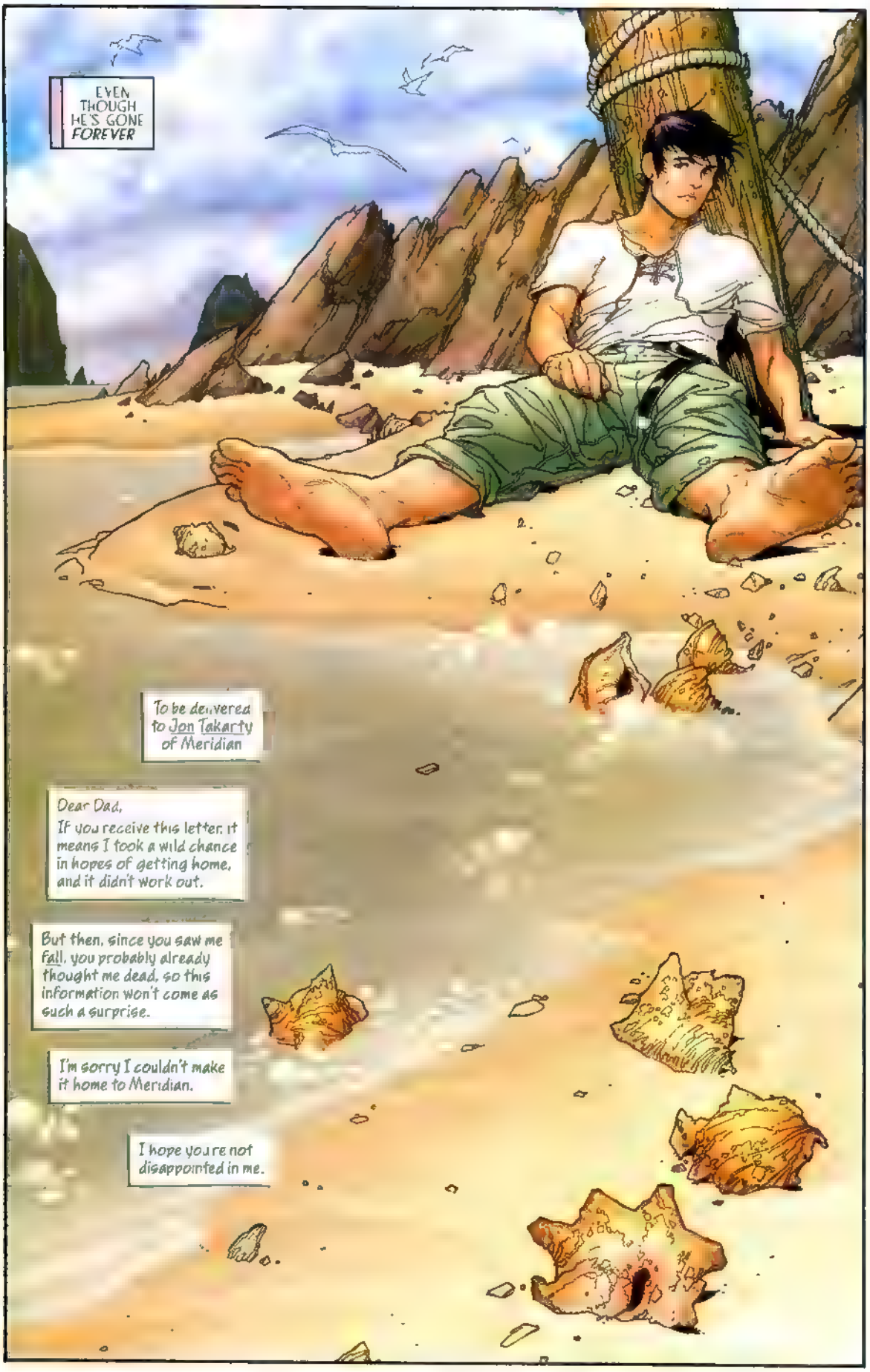

OOOOOOH!
UNNGH!
HUH!
WE MAKE THE HEAVY *SHIPS* FLOAT
WHY CAN'T WE DO THE SAME FOR THE *SAILS!*
THE WORK'S TOO MUCH FOR ONE, FEABIE--
WAIT FOR HELP!
I NEARLY HAD IT STOWED AWAY, ISAGO
I CAN *DO* THIS
YES, YOU *CAN*
BUT YOU DON'T *LIKE* IT
FEABIE, YOU AND I DON'T WORK IN THE RESIDENCE ANY MORE, TRUE, BUT THOSE JOBS BEING GONE DOESN'T MEAN THAT YOU HAVE TO DO WORK THAT DOESN'T *SUIT* YOU
ISAGO AND I *LIKE* WORKING ON THE SHIPS. YOU DON'T. THERE'S PLENTY OF OPPORTUNITIES ELSEWHERE!
BUT I *HAVE* TO DO THIS, ZOUKA!
JAD *LOVED* SHIPS AND SAILING THE SKY
THIS WAY I CAN STILL FEEL CLOSE TO HIM


EVEN THOUGH HE'S GONE FOREVER
To be delivered to Jon Takarty of Meridian
Dear Dad,
If you receive this letter, it means I took a wild chance in hopes of getting home, and it didn't work out.
But then, since you saw me fall, you probably already thought me dead, so this information won't come as such a surprise.
I'm sorry I couldn't make it home to Meridian.
I hope you're not disappointed in me.

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'VE BEEN GETTING AN OVERSIZED FISH HOLD YOU HOSTAGE!
IF YOU COULD FISH *HERE*, YOU WOULDN'T HAVE TO SEND YOUR SHIPS SO FAR AWAY, AND THERE'D BE ONE I COULD USE TO GET HOME!
SURE, THE TOXIC TIDE'S MADE FOR SOME STRANGE NEW CREATURES BUT WE
--I MEAN *MERIDIANITES*
WE'VE NEVER ENCOUNTERED A *ONE* THAT COULDN'T BE KILLED
SO *NO* ONE AMONG YOU HAS EVEN BOTHERED TO STUDY ITS HABITS?
NO, BUT IF YOU FIND A WAY TO RID US OF THE PEST, MAHANEV SAYS WE'LL DROP ALL TO GET YOU HOME TO MERIDIAN
STOP IT BOY! YOU'LL JUST *ANGER* IT!
AND STOP ENCOURAGING HIM EMMONS!
I DON'T CARE *WHAT* IT *FEELS*
AS LONG AS I CAN MAKE IT SHOW ITSELF
C'MON, CRT
GIVE ME A LOOK AT YOU
In fact, I'm hoping you'll be proud of me. I'm doing exactly what you would have done-- attack the problem directly.
No matter what you may have thought, all the times you've hung your head because of me--

-- I have learned a lot from you.

THERE YOU ARE

Not that it hasn't been hard living up to the legend of Jon Takarty.

There's the stories you've told me about the adventures you've had--

-- then there's the stories the other sailors had to tell about the ones you wouldn't share with me.

Like I said, that's all been a hard load to haul, but I'm trying my best.

COME AWAY, JAD
YOU'LL ONLY RILE IT FURTHER!
WHICH WILL MAKE IT REVEAL MORE OF ITS AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIORS. DON'T WORRY RIDAH, I'VE HAD MY SHARE OF EXPERIENCE HUNTING MONSTERS
YOU CAN'T CONTINUE THIS!
YOU'LL ONLY WIND UP IN THE CREATURE'S BELLY!
OH THERE'S NO HARM IN TRYING
LET'S SAY THE WORST HAPPENS AND IT DOES GET ME
I'M ALREADY DEAD
OR THAT'S WHAT THEY THINK BACK UP ON MERIDIAN

I don't mind telling you, Dad, that I'm scared.
I'm on the surface, hunting a monster, alone
The other people left here are the elderly or the infirm, so they're no help for me.
So even though I'm working with only my fears as my companion, I'm even more afraid of not trying
Because I know you would have tried
And probably succeeded
Me, I'm tackling this encounter in what you'd call the right way
Collect and evaluate data, looking for patterns habits, and other clues.
Glean an idea from information and observation.
Test to prove my hunches right or wrong.
Then test once more to confirm.
Whatever happens, I took a chance, but not a foolish one.

I HEAR YOU'VE BEEN STALKING THE SEA CREATURE

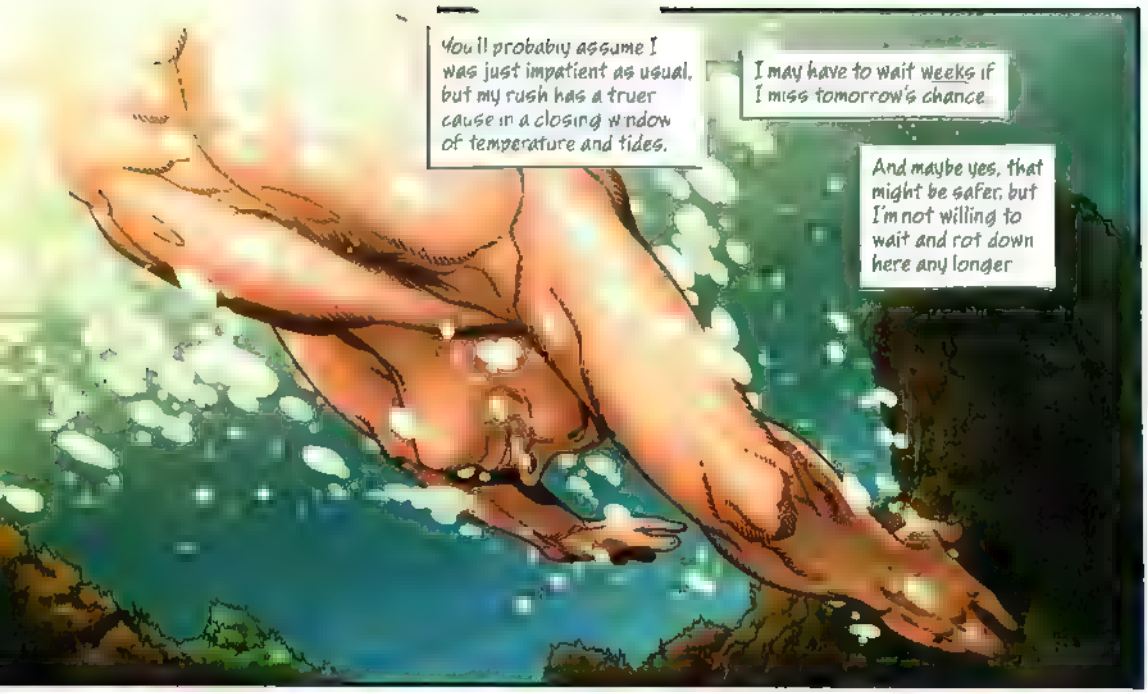
DESPITE MY JOKES, YOU THAT EAGER TO LEAVE OUR FINE SHORES THAT YOU'D SEEK THE ETERNAL DEPTHS THIS WAY?
WITH ALL RESPECT, ELDER MAKANEV, *YOU* PROMISED THAT IF I GOT RID OF IT FOR YOU, YOUR NEXT SHIP TAKES ME HOME

AYE, JAD, BUT THE SEASONS *ALMOST* DONE ONCE SUPPLIES FOR WINTER ARE LAID IN THERE'LL BE A SHIP TO SPARE TO TAKE YOU UP TO YOUR SKY ISLAND

SO I KEEP *HEARING*
BUT I'M STARTING TO SUSPECT THAT YOUR SEASONS HAVE NO END
PREPARE TO PAY UP

BECAUSE THAT CREATURE'S AS GOOD AS DEAD
Dive point
hunt trails converge at den?
quietest at sun's height
low tide at midday coming

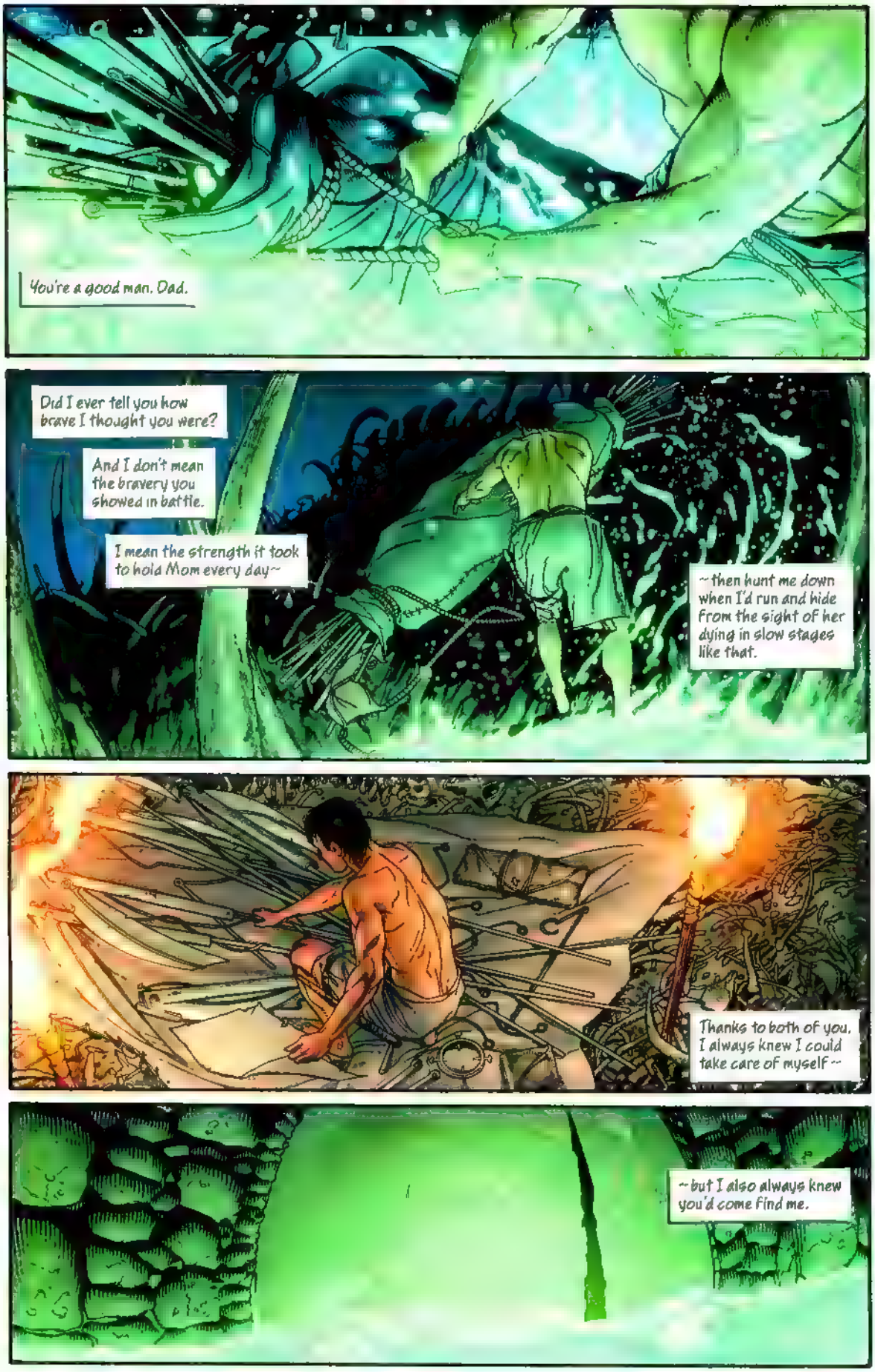
JAD!
I have my plan as well prepared as I can, so I'll attempt it tomorrow.
I'LL BE FINE, RIDAH
NO, JAD! YOU'LL NOT TRULY RISK IT?
OF COURSE! I'VE GOT TO PAY FOR MY PASSAGE! MY OWN SKIN'S THE ONLY RESOURCE I'VE GOT TO RISK IN EXCHANGE
I can't wait any longer
AND IT'S ONE I LIKE TOO MUCH TO RISK EASILY
MY STUDY'S SHOWN ONE CRUCIAL FACT
ALTHOUGH IT WILL STRIKE AT DANGER--
IT ONLY EATS DEAD FLESH
--AND I PLAN TO STAY ALIVE!
I want to go home.


You'll probably assume I was just impatient as usual, but my rush has a truer cause in a closing window of temperature and tides.
I may have to wait weeks if I miss tomorrow's chance.
And maybe yes, that might be safer, but I'm not willing to wait and rot down here any longer.

I've GOT to get home, Dad!
If my, yes, impatience proves... to be a bad idea, well~
You always did say I was my mother's son~

Reckless, impatient, and utterly irresistible

So remember my good traits the way you've always remembered hers to me.
You're so lucky, Dad
You've gotten to love two good women.
Me, there's only been one. And only almost.
And who knows? Sephie and I ~~might have been~~
Might yet be as perfect together as you and Mom


You're a good man, Dad.
Did I ever tell you how brave I thought you were?
And I don't mean the bravery you showed in battle.
I mean the strength it took to hold Mom every day~
~then hunt me down when I'd run and hide from the sight of her dying in slow stages like that.
Thanks to both of you. I always knew I could take care of myself~
~but I also always knew you'd come find me.

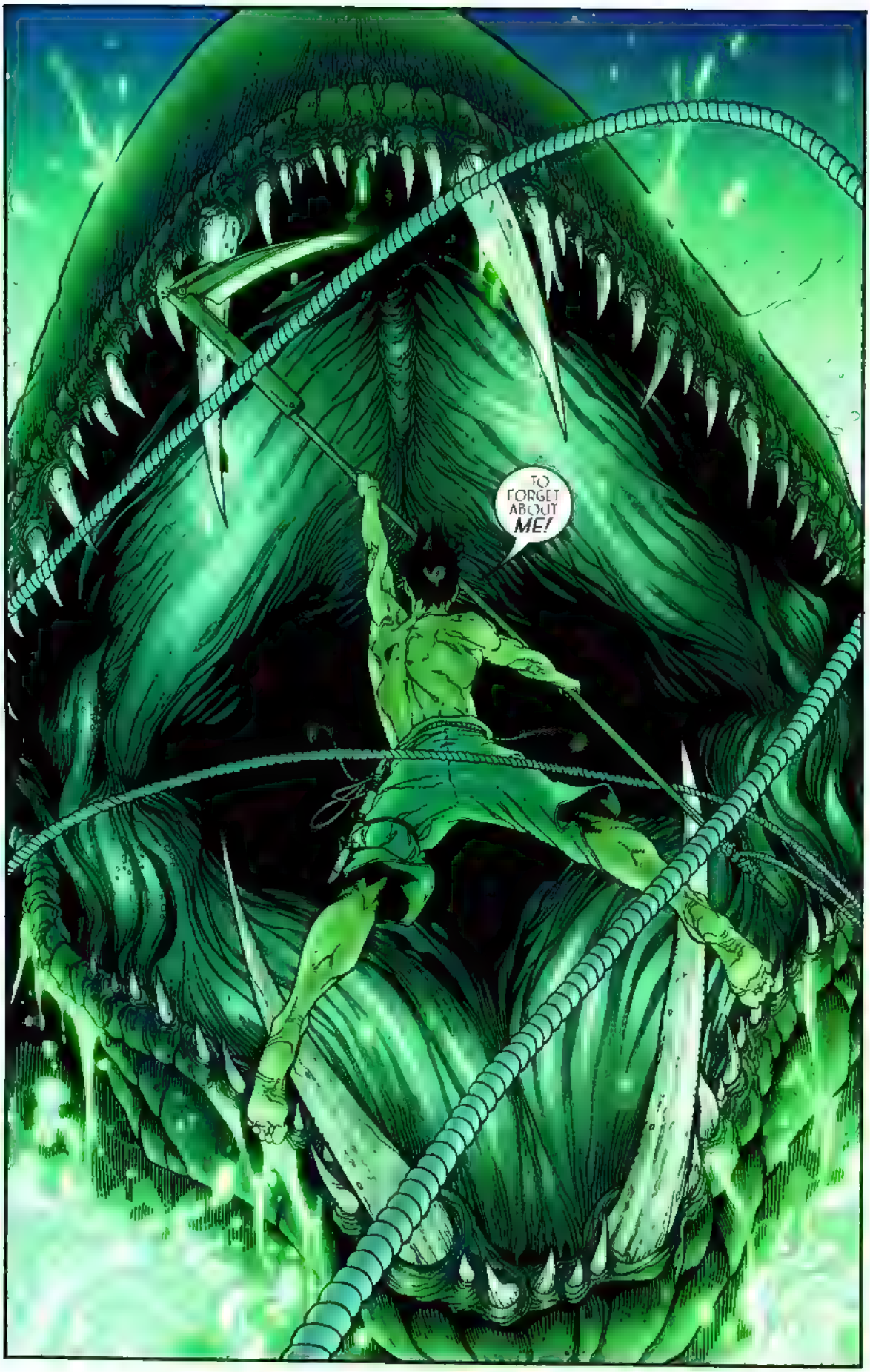
You're a good father. There's nothing you could have done any better in raising a son.
If I am prepared for life's trials, it is all because of you.
I'M ALL READY FOR YOU, FISHFACE --
SHOW YOURSELF SPRING THE TRAP AND SEND ME HOME
OH, HO
YOU'RE BLOCKING THE WAY IN?
YOU'RE SMARTER THAN I THOUGHT
WELL, SO AM I

C'MERE!
FRESH MEAT!
HOW CAN YOU KNOW MY HARPOON'S RANGE?
COME GET ME!
COME ON!
Before you decide I threw my life away for a--
STUPID FISH

~dare or a stunt, you need to know this.
Dad, it's not about the monster.
It's not about killing the monster.
It's about knowing I can.
That I will have dared something worthy of you.

THE ONLY WAY OUT'S THE ONE YOU'RE PROTECTING! THAT'S IT, FISH
I'M THROUGH BEING PATIENT
IF I STILL HAD SOME OF SEPHIE'S POWER YOU'D BE DINNER FOR SCAVENGERS ALREADY!
AND I'D BE BACK HOME WHERE I WOULDN'T HAVE TO SMELL ROTTING FISH!
And if it proves too tough and I come back empty-handed, or not all all--
FORGET THE TRAP!
LIKE THEY FORGOT ME
I tried my best
NOT ANYMORE, FISH
That's enough.

I will have learned how much I can, or can't, do.
THIS TIME
PAK
KRTSCHSH
NO ONE GETS A CHANCE--
THAP


TO FORGET ABOUT ME!

So, Dad, take a look up at the night sky sometime.
I'll be shining up there next to Mom so the starlight will remind you --
--every night--
--just how much I love you

Proud to have been your son, I remain,
Jad Takarigz
IT'S NO USE, RIDAH
EVEN IF HE'S FOUND A SOURCE OF AIR, THE CREATURE'S LIKELY TAKEN HIM BY NOW
PERHAPS IT'S FOR THE BEST A WILD SKY BOY LIKE THAT WOULD HAVE LEFT US ANYWAY
LOOKA THERE!
MOTION, I THINK!
POOR JAD
SO YOUNG
EH?
YUP, IT'S MOVIN'

DOESN'T SEEM HAPPY
NO, IT SURELY DOESN'T

SORRY ABOUT THE BOY RIDAH
YES POOR JAD
KNEW IT WOULD COME TO THIS

EEEY!

WHUDD

WHATEVER POSSESSED THE CREATURE TO BEACH ITSELF? YOU DON'T SUPPOSE THE BOY FOUND A WAY TO KILL IT ?
RRRPTCH
APPEARS SO APPEARS DEAD
IT IS-
RRRPTCH
BUT I'M NOT!
YOU CAN BURN THAT LETTER NOW RIPAH
I'LL TELL HIM EVERYTHING IT SAYS MYSELF
SO ABOUT MY SHIP ?

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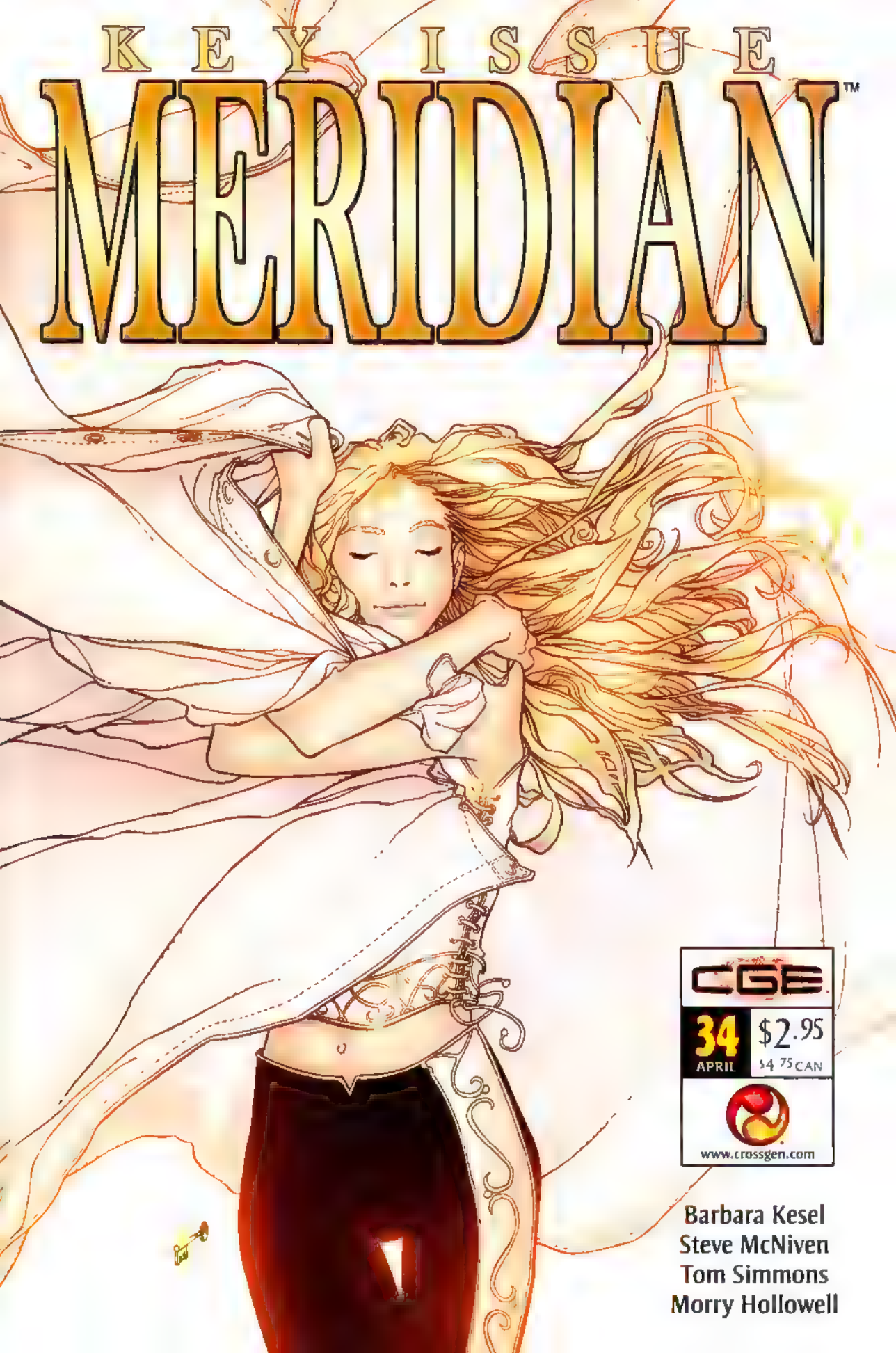
KEY ISSUE

MERIDIAN™



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Far away on the world of Demetria,

explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

One of these islands is Meridian, home of shipbuilders and Sephie. Sephie has become the Minister of Meridian after her father Turos' death. Her uncle Ilahn is the Minister of the rich city-state of Cadador, which controls most of the shipping and trade on Demetria.

A mysterious force has endowed both Sephie and Ilahn with power – opposing forces – Ilahn's destruction versus Sephie's renewal.

Ilahn wants to control Sephie – and Meridian – but Sephie has been fighting to resist Ilahn's control of herself and Demetria's commerce. The conflict between them erupts into a battle, during which Ilahn disappears...apparently dead at Sephie's hands. Sephie takes control of Cadador, but the Ministry is taken from her by Reesha Teramu. Banished from Cadador, Sephie and the crew of the sunship depart, hoping to unite Demetria into a series of new trade coalitions independent of Cadador's influence. Sephie and crew's first trade mission unites the relocated ironworkers of Torbel with the dye factories of the surface city of Akasia .

The sunship's mission continues peacefully, with Sephie unaware that Ilahn has resurfaced in Cadador but is content to leave Reesha operating as Minister in order to covertly pursue a vendetta...

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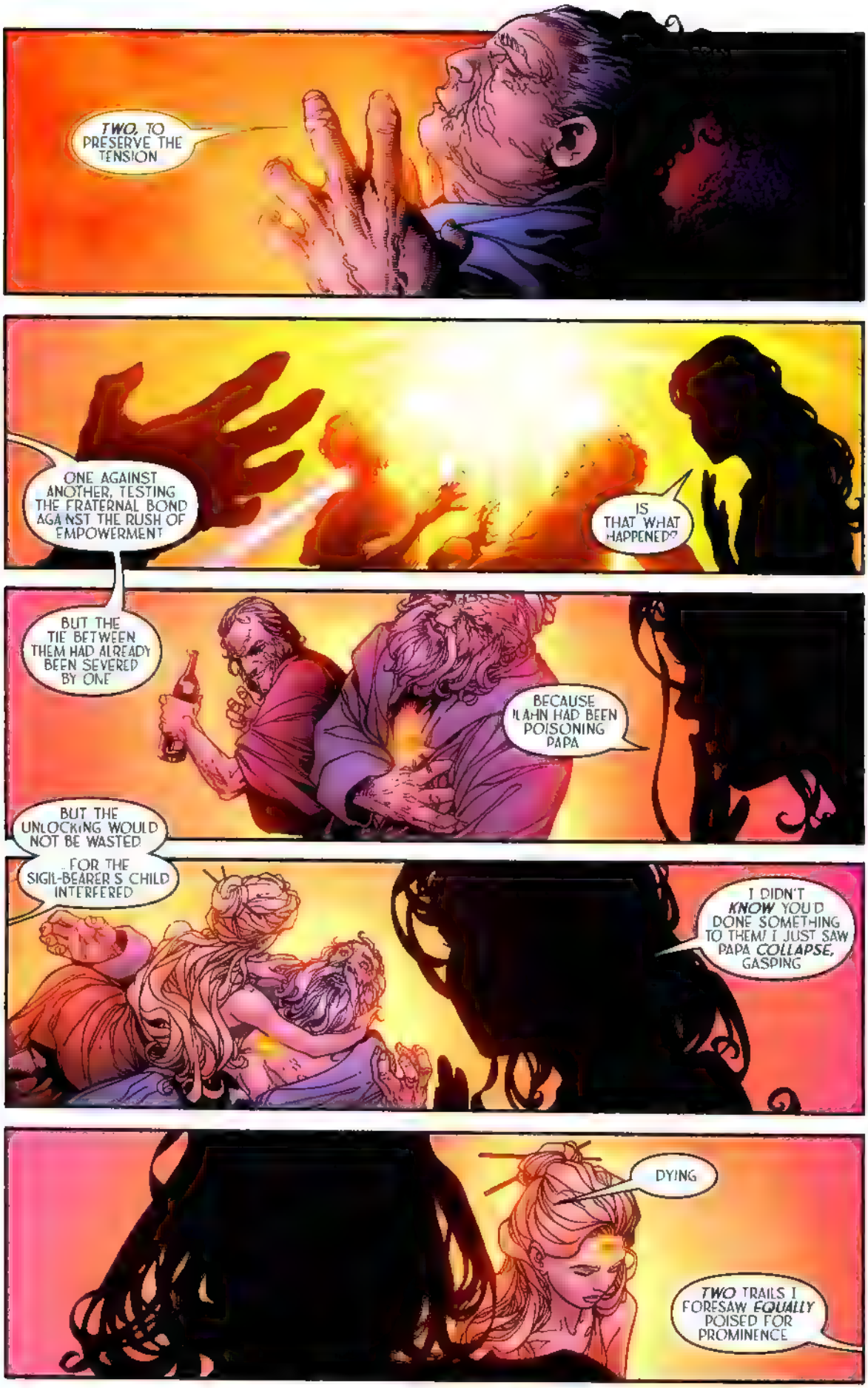
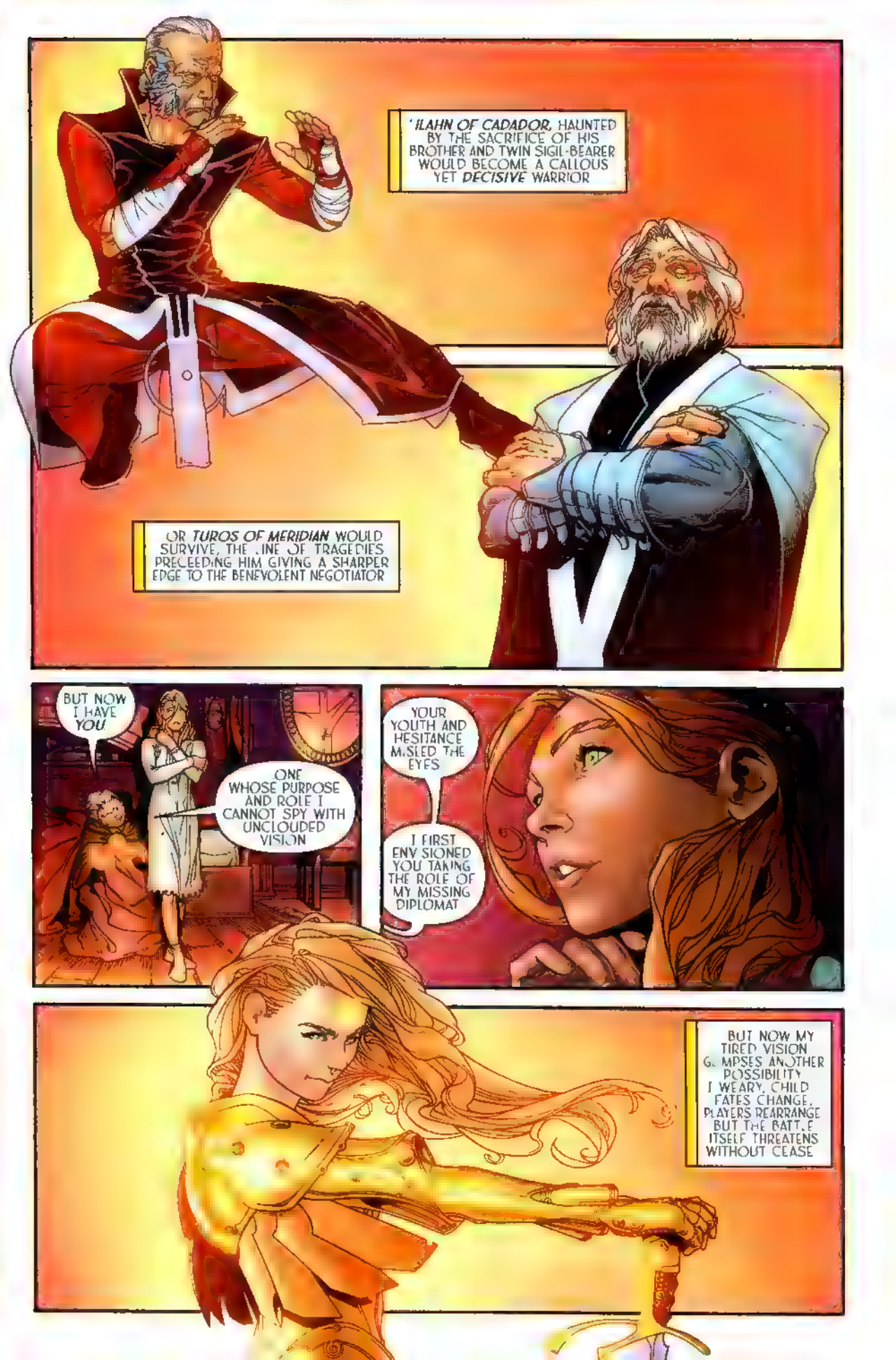
Growing up is strangely sudden, even though it takes years
You go to sleep each night the same
Or, at least, you think you are.
As you breathe long breaths, the future entwines slowly around you, dreamtime fantasies easing the transformation into an entirely new being
SEPHIE?

SEPHIE
EVEN AT REST, THE DAUGHTER OF MERIDIAN TROUBLES FATE, TWISTING THE WINDS OF KNOWN INTO THE TURBULENT UNKNOWN
WHA-?
WHO?
I AM THE MUSE
THE UNHEARD MUSIC OF GIATAN, THE MEMORY OF LOST PLACES AND SEER OF FLEXING PROBABILITIES
YOU--!
I KNOW WHO YOU ARE
WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?

I AM PLAGUED BY AN ANOMALY
YOU, SEPHIE OF MERIDIAN, HAVE BEEN REMARKABLY SUCCESSFUL FOR A SIGIL BEARER WHO SHOULD BY ALL RIGHTS HAVE NEVER EXISTED!
SHOULDN'T--?
WHY NOT?
WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME?
OH, NOT A THING CHILD
BUT IT WAS YOUR *FATHER* WHOM FATE CRAVED AND I CHOSE, NOT YOU
MY FATH-- *YOU* DID ALL THIS?
YOU MADE THE SIGILS APPEAR?
OH, NO
I MERELY ADVISED THE CREATOR
THE CREATOR?
THEN YOU KNOW *WHY*
WHY, MUSE?
WHY WAS I MARKED?
BUT IT WAS NOT YOU WHO WAS MARKED


TWO, TO PRESERVE THE TENSION
ONE AGAINST ANOTHER, TESTING THE FRATERNAL BOND AGAINST THE RUSH OF EMPOWERMENT
IS THAT WHAT HAPPENED?
BUT THE TIE BETWEEN THEM HAD ALREADY BEEN SEVERED BY ONE
BECAUSE ILAHN HAD BEEN POISONING PAPA
BUT THE UNLOCKING WOULD NOT BE WASTED
...FOR THE SIGIL-BEARER'S CHILD INTERFERED
I DIDN'T KNOW YOU'D DONE SOMETHING TO THEM! I JUST SAW PAPA COLLAPSE, GASPING
DYING
TWO TRAILS I FORESAW EQUALLY POISED FOR PROMINENCE


'ILAHN OF CADADOR, HAUNTED BY THE SACRIFICE OF HIS BROTHER AND TWIN SIGIL-BEARER WOULD BECOME A CALLOUS YET DECISIVE WARRIOR
OR TUROS OF MERIDIAN WOULD SURVIVE, THE LINE OF TRAGEDIES PRECEEDING HIM GIVING A SHARPER EDGE TO THE BENEVOLENT NEGOTIATOR
BUT NOW I HAVE YOU
ONE WHOSE PURPOSE AND ROLE I CANNOT SPY WITH UNCLOUDED VISION
YOUR YOUTH AND HESITANCE MISLED THE EYES
I FIRST ENVISIONED YOU TAKING THE ROLE OF MY MISSING DIPLOMAT
BUT NOW MY TIRED VISION GLIMPSES ANOTHER POSSIBILITY
I WEARY, CHILD FATES CHANGE, PLAYERS REARRANGE BUT THE BATTLE ITSELF THREATENS WITHOUT CEASE

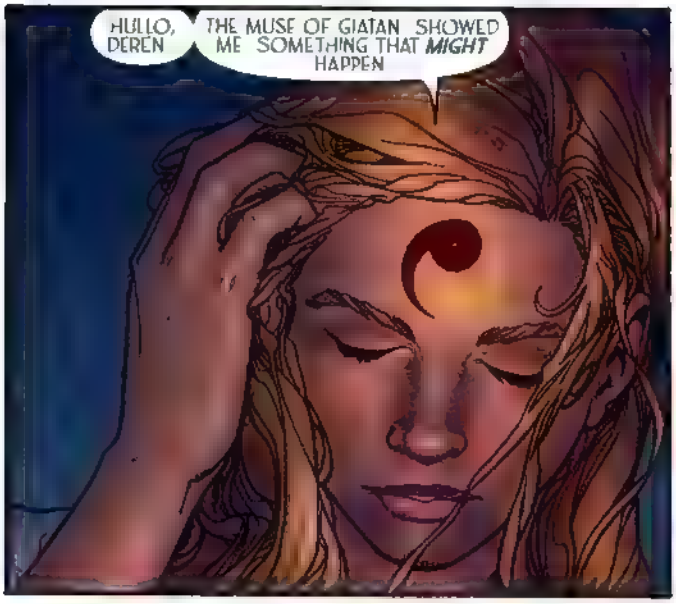
NO MATTER WHAT YOU THINK YOU SEE
I'M NOT A SOLDIER
I'M THE MINISTER OF MERIDIAN
AND THE PROTECTOR OF DEMETRIA
MY DUTY IS *HERE*
AH, BUT THE *HERE* YOU DEEM PRECIOUS IS BUT A PART OF THE *ALL* THREATENED IF IT LACKS DEFENDERS. I SEE GREAT DANGER AHEAD--
YOU SEEM TO *SEE* ALL SORT OF INTERESTING THINGS!
YOU WERE MY *UNCLE ILAHN'S* ADVISER, MUSE--DID YOU TELL HIM THE SAME FANTASTIC TALE?
ILAHN?
THEY TELL OF HIS *DEATH*
VOICES LINK *YOU* TO THE DEED
THAT'S UNTRUE AND YOU *KNOW* IT!
SEE WHAT I KNOW TO BE TRUE!

THE TRUTH OF YOU, SEPHIE OF MERIDIAN--
SEE YOUR FEARLESSNESS EVEN WHEN PIERCED BY THE RAGGED TALONS OF FEAR!
FEARLESS? I WAS JUST STARTLED AND SCARED--ILAHN HAD DISHONORED MY FAMILY
I SENSE YOUR COMPASSION FOR LIFE, EVEN THE BASEST OF PREDATORS
BUT ALL CREATURES HAVE THEIR PLACE!
YOUR TENACIOUS REFUSAL TO LOSE HOPE, EVEN IN THE FACE OF IMPOSSIBILITY
IF I HAD A SECOND CHANCE - I - I COULD HAVE SAVED MORE
AND THE WISDOM YOU REVEAL-- KNOWING THAT THERE ARE MOMENTS WHEN COMPASSION MUST BE WITHHELD
WISDOM? BUT IT WAS ANGER
DO NOT DENY THE VISION OF THE EYES, CHILD!
MY OWN ARE OPEN TO GREATER VERITIES THAN YOU CAN COMPREHEND!
I SEE HOW VALUABLE AN ASSET YOU HAVE BECOME!

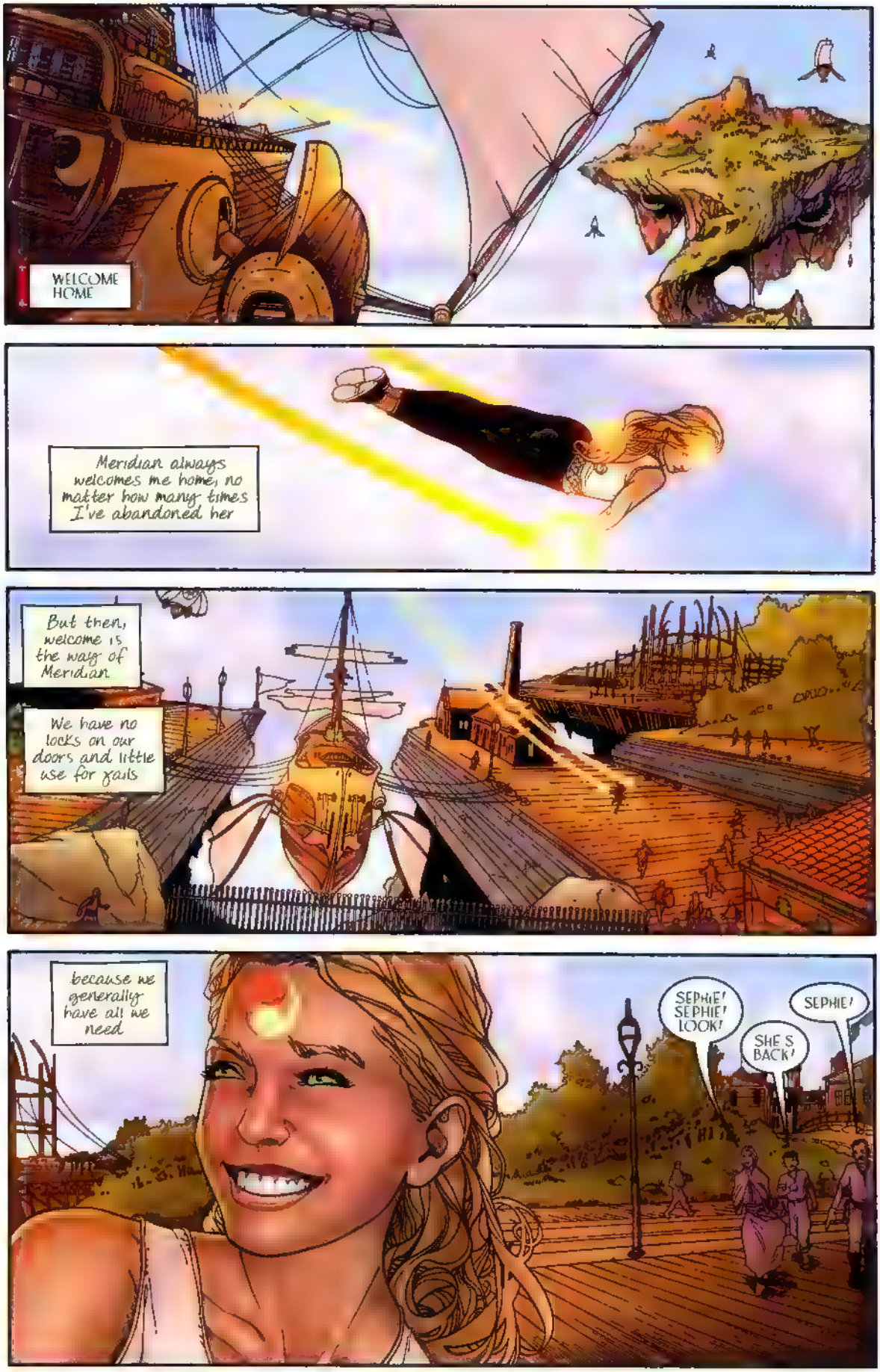
ASSET?
YOU SAY THAT LIKE I'M A TOOL!
NOT A TOOL, BUT A *WEAPON*
ACCEPT OR DENY, YET YOUR FUTURE HOLDS ONE CERTAINTY--
SOON YOU WILL BE

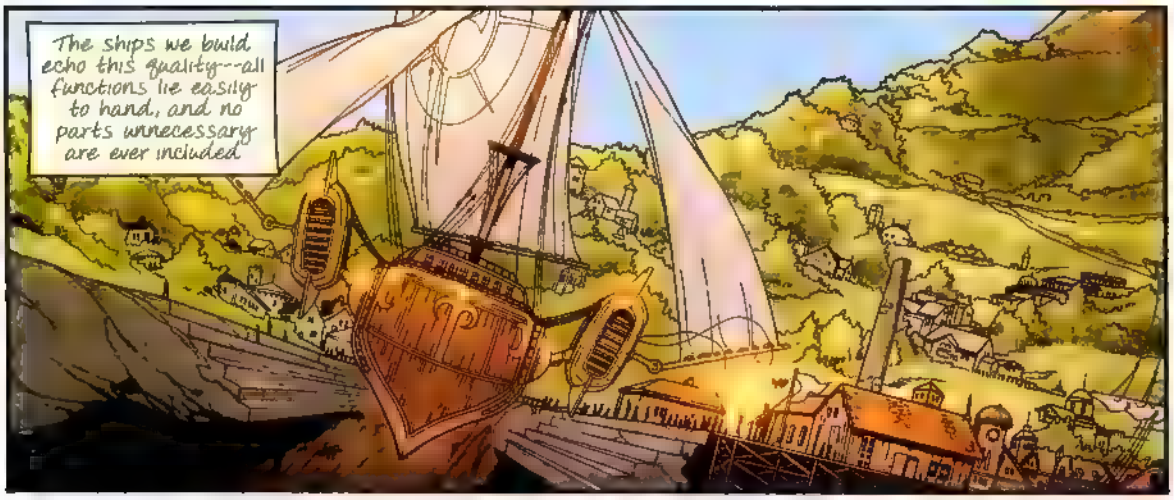
CHOOSE?
CHOOSE *WHAT?*
MUSE?
SEPHIE?

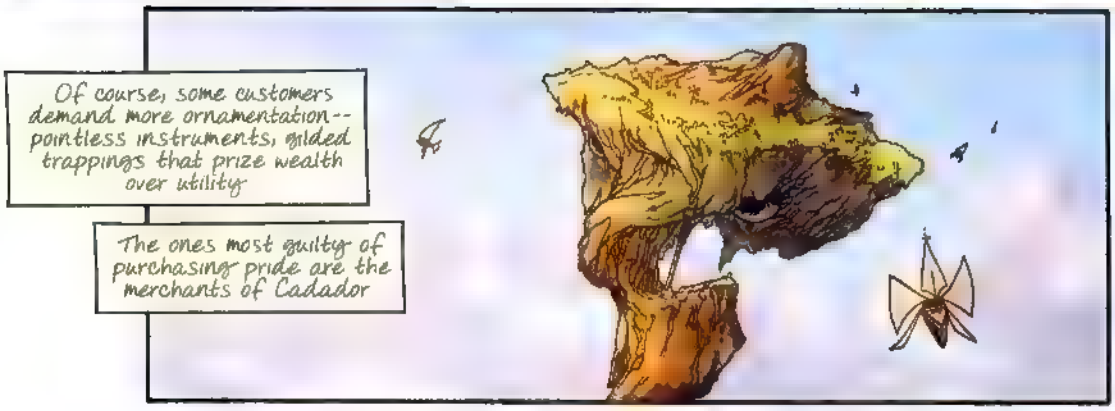
THE *MUSE?*
NO ONE HAS *EVER* MISTAKEN ME FOR *HER*
I TAKE IT YOU HAD A *VISITOR?*


HULLO, DEREN
THE MUSE OF GIATAN SHOWED ME SOMETHING THAT *MIGHT* HAPPEN

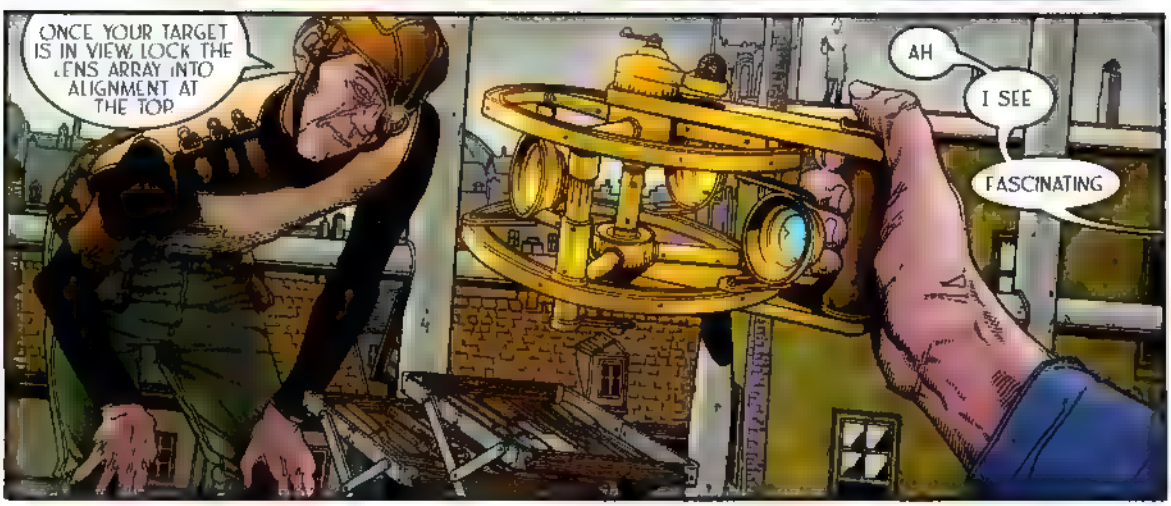
SHE DOES THAT A LOT. RIDDLES AND TAUNTS, USUALLY TRUE BUT RARELY HELPFUL
I CAN TELL YOU SOMETHING *DEFINITE*
WE'VE REACHED *MERIDIAN*


WELCOME HOME
Meridian always welcomes me home, no matter how many times I've abandoned her
But then, welcome is the way of Meridian
We have no locks on our doors and little use for jails
because we generally have all we need
SEPHIE! SEPHIE! LOOK!
SHE'S BACK!
SEPHIE!

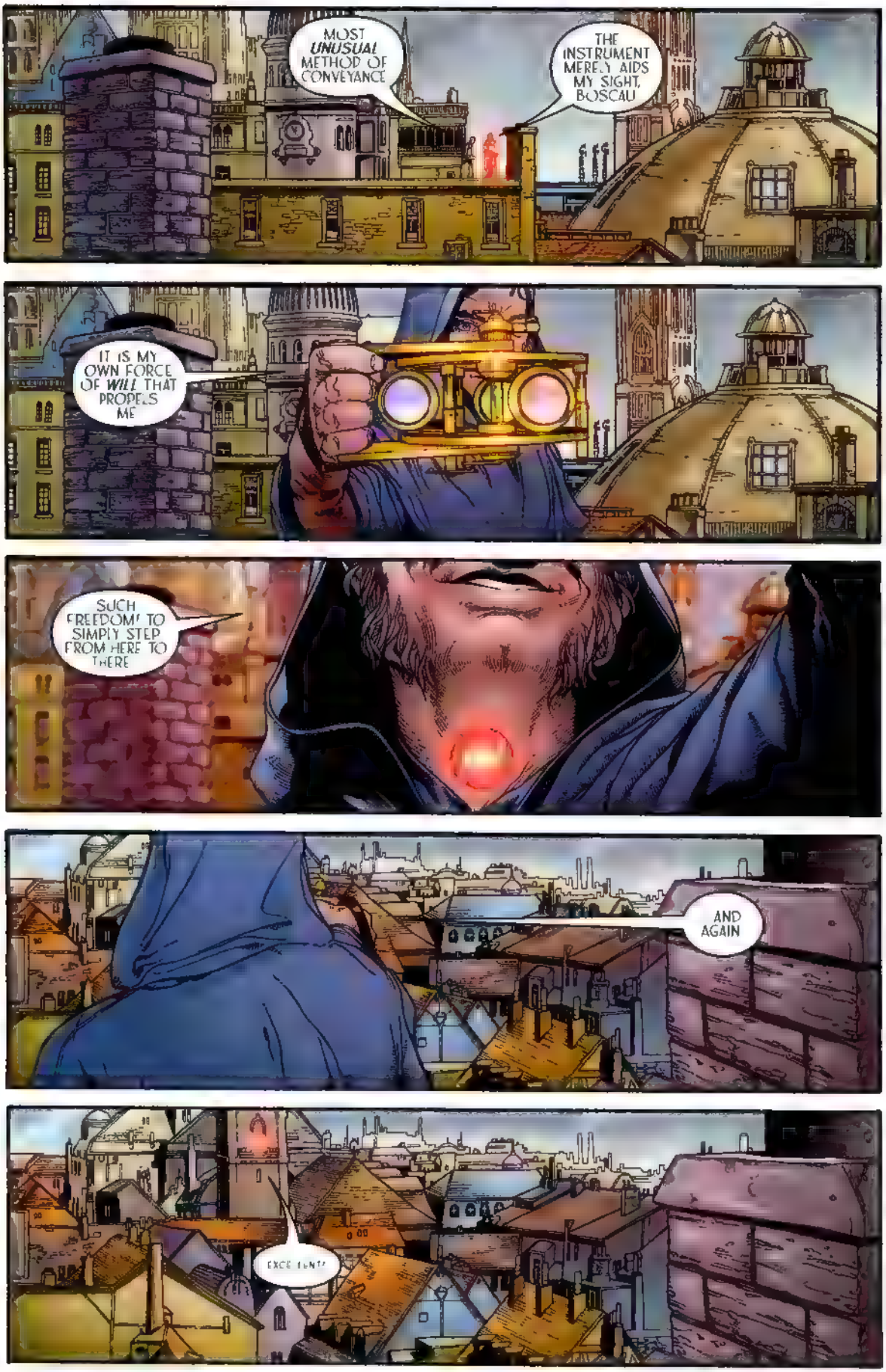

The ships we build echo this quality--all functions lie easily to hand, and no parts unnecessary are ever included

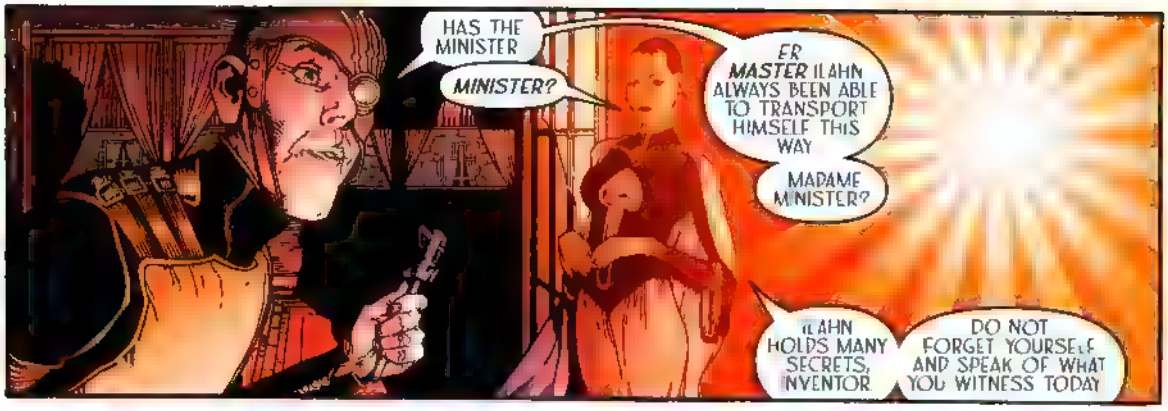

Of course, some customers demand more ornamentation--pointless instruments, gilded trappings that prize wealth over utility
The ones most guilty of purchasing pride are the merchants of Cadador

Like Uncle Iiahn, who wasted the resources to carve the bare rock of his estate into an illusion of Meridian
Why, I wonder?
He was so eager to leave the island of his birth, yet.
he recreated it
I'VE ADJUSTED IT AS YOU INDICATED, MASTER TAUMPSIN
WHAT NEXT?


ONCE YOUR TARGET IS IN VIEW, LOCK THE LENS ARRAY INTO ALIGNMENT AT THE TOP
AH
I SEE
FASCINATING

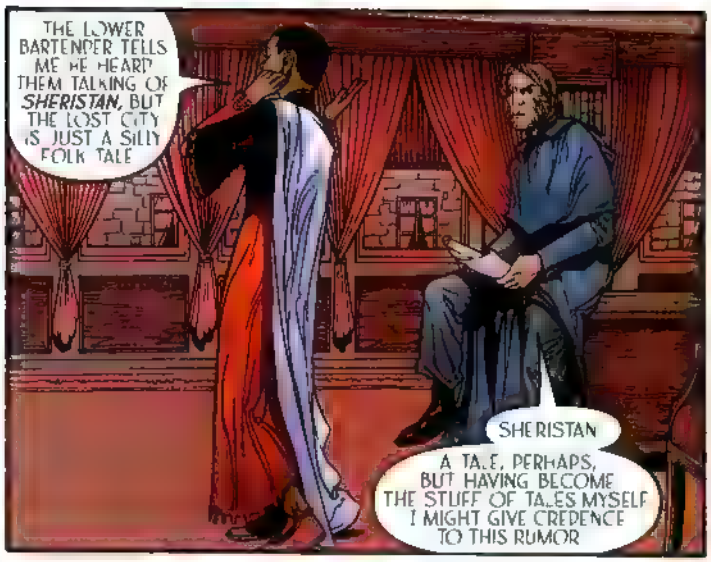
YOU'VE DONE WELL, TAUMPSIN
YOUR CONTINUING SERVICES AND DISCRETION--WILL BE WELL RECOMPENSED
ILAHN, YOU'RE TAKING A TERRIBLE RISK WHAT IF ?
DON'T IMAGINE YOURSELF IN SOLE CONTROL OF CADADOR'S MINISTRY JUST YET, DEAR REESHA THIS EXERCISE IS ENTIRELY UNDER MY CONTROL--IT IS MERELY A MATTER OF WILL.
WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF TAUMPSIN'S INVENTION, I WILL SHORTLY BE NOT HERE
AH EXCELLENT
WELL DONE, MASTER ILAHN
THANK YOU BOSCAU


MOST UNUSUAL METHOD OF CONVEYANCE
THE INSTRUMENT MERELY AIDS MY SIGHT, BOSCAU
IT IS MY OWN FORCE OF WILL THAT PROPELS ME
SUCH FREEDOM! TO SIMPLY STEP FROM HERE TO THERE
AND AGAIN
EXCELLENT!

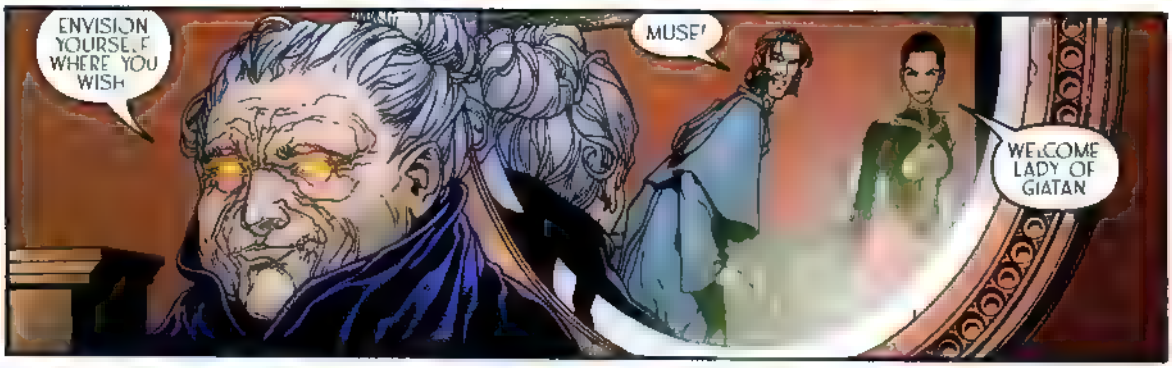

HAS THE MINISTER
MINISTER?
ER MASTER ILAHN ALWAYS BEEN ABLE TO TRANSPORT HIMSELF THIS WAY
MADAME MINISTER?
ILAHN HOLDS MANY SECRETS, INVENTOR
DO NOT FORGET YOURSELF AND SPEAK OF WHAT YOU WITNESS TODAY

OR YOU R SK LEARNING WHAT OTHER POWER ILAHN WIELDS!
HOW EXHILARATING!
BUT I MUST REST NOW--
EVEN A NEWLY YOUNG HEART DEMANDS A PAUSE TO ITS EXCITEMENT

LADY REESHA, DID MY SPIES REPORT TO YOU WHAT I WISHED TO KNOW?
NO, NOT AT ALL

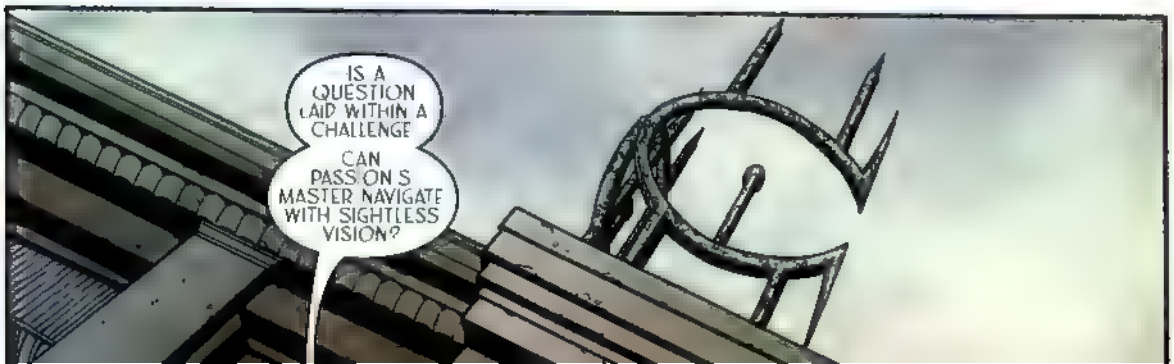

THE LOWER BARTENDER TELLS ME HE HEARD THEM TALKING OF SHERISTAN, BUT THE LOST CITY IS JUST A SILLY FOLK TALE
SHERISTAN
A TALE, PERHAPS, BUT HAVING BECOME THE STUFF OF TALES MYSELF I MIGHT GIVE CREDENCE TO THIS RUMOR

SHE MAY HAVE UNCOVERED SOME TRUTH BEHIND THE TALE, BUT HOW CAN I FOLLOW SUCH A WILL O-THE-WISP?
HMMM PERHAPS A MAP ONE WITH THE PROPER COORDINATES
BUT, NO, EVEN WITH TAUMPSIN'S INVENTION, I CANNOT GO WHERE I CANNOT SEE
SEE WITH *MORE* THAN EYES, SIGIL BEARER

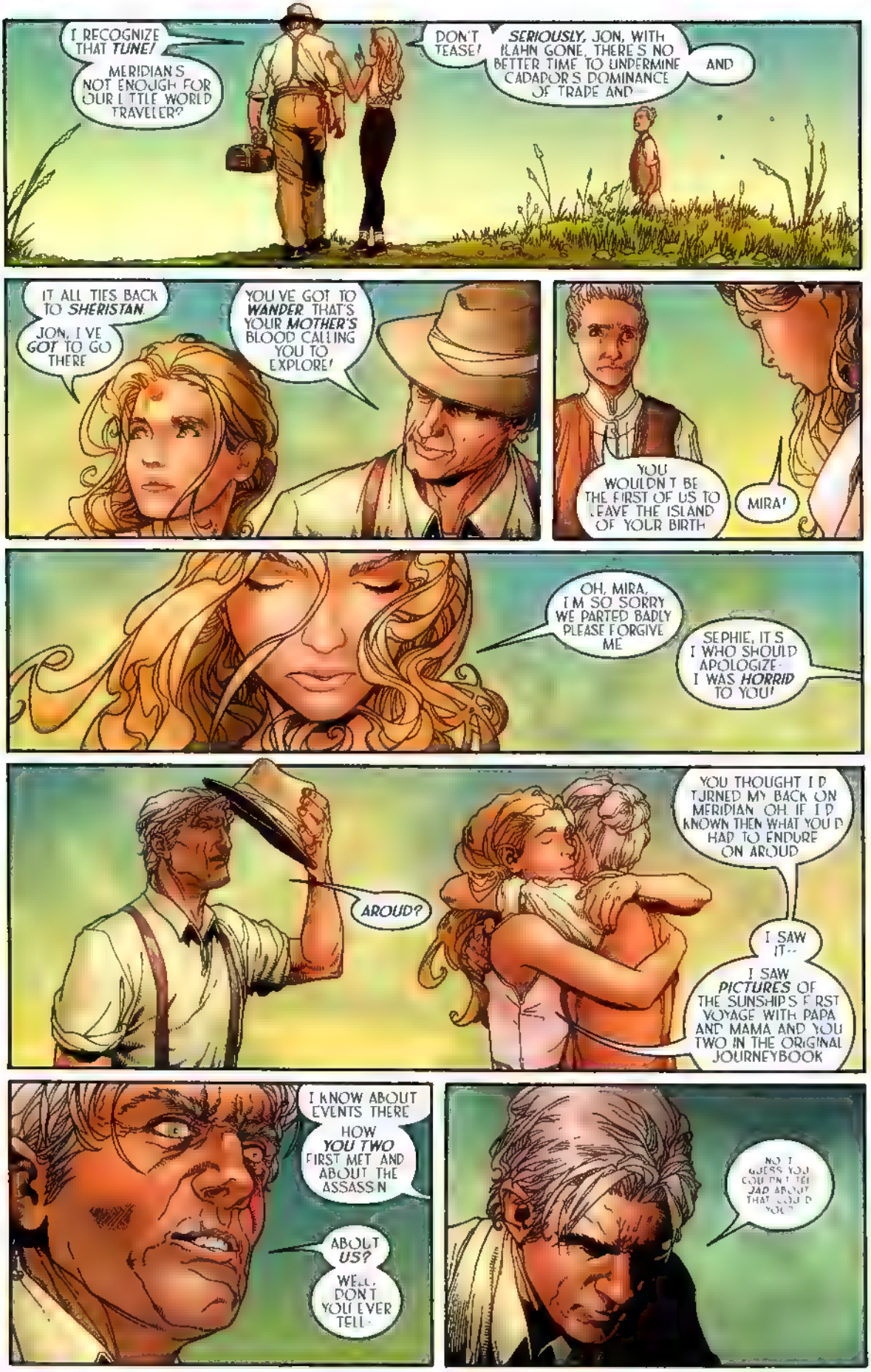

ENVISION YOURSELF WHERE YOU WISH
MUSE!
WELCOME LADY OF GIATAN

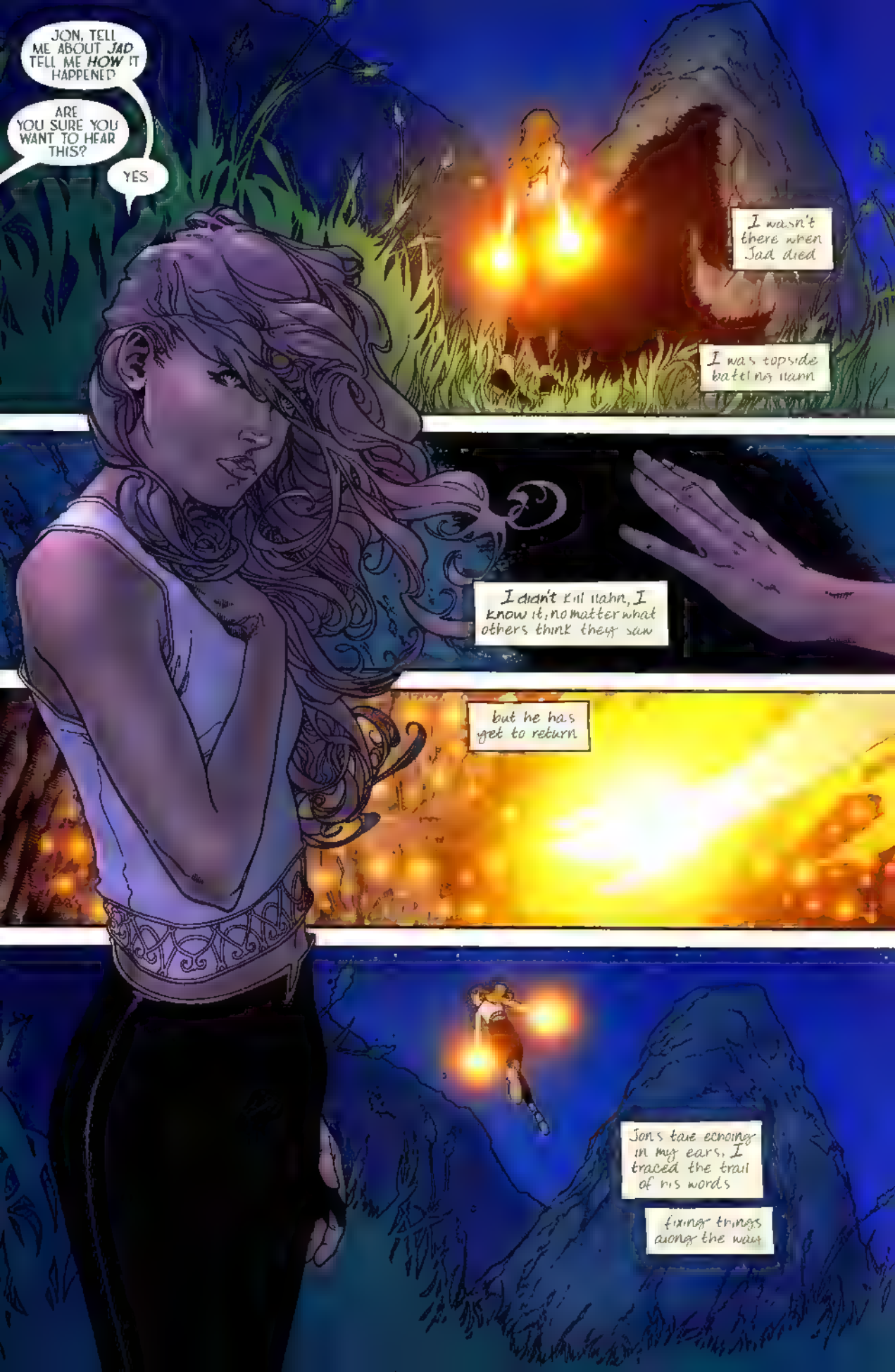
IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOUR WISE SELF AGAIN
I TRUST IT WILL BE FOR MERE MOMENTS AS USUAL

ENVISION MYSELF, YOU SAY?
DO YOU MERELY TEASE, OR MIGHT THIS BE THE COY ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF AN ADVANTAGE I GAIN OVER MY NIECE?
WHAT I *SEE*, MINISTER OF CADADOR--


IS A QUESTION LAID WITHIN A CHALLENGE
CAN PASSION'S MASTER NAVIGATE WITH SIGHTLESS VISION?

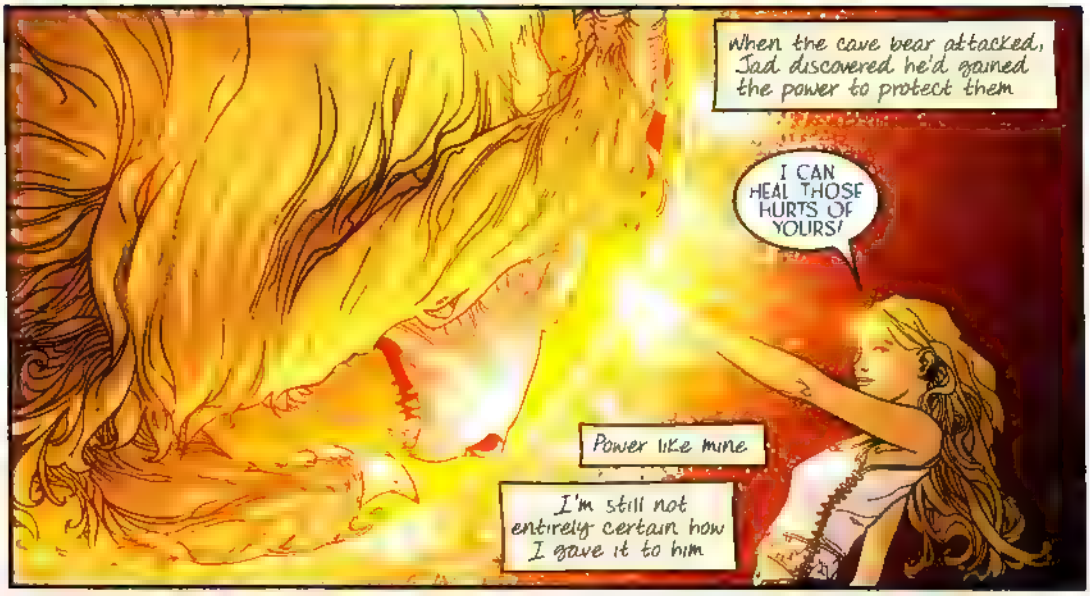
LOOK AT THAT!
BUILT IN A DAY, AND NOT A SHINGLE OUT OF PLACE!
YOU'RE A MARVEL, SEPHIE!
NICELY DONE, MY MINISTER!
NICELY DESIGNED, REGENT TAKARTY!
IT'S A WONDERFUL MINISTRY BUILDING YOU MIGHT EVEN LIKE LIVING WITHIN ITS WALLS
WHEN YOU'RE DOING SUCH A GOOD JOB GOVERNING MERIDIAN IN MY ABSENCE?
I--I CAN'T, JON
I HAVE SOMETHING I NEED TO DO FOR ALL OF DEMETRIA BEFORE I CAN SETTLE DOWN HERE
AND THERE'S... SOMETHING ELSE AN OBLIGATION I MAY HAVE TO FULFILL
I MAY HAVE TO JOURNEY FAR AWAY


I RECOGNIZE THAT *TUNE!*
MERIDIAN'S NOT ENOUGH FOR OUR LITTLE WORLD TRAVELER?
DON'T TEASE!
SERIOUSLY, JON, WITH KAHN GONE, THERE'S NO BETTER TIME TO UNDERMINE CADAPOR'S DOMINANCE OF TRADE AND—
AND
IT ALL TIES BACK TO *SHERISTAN*
JON, I'VE *GOT* TO GO THERE
YOU'VE GOT TO *WANDER* THAT'S YOUR *MOTHER'S* BLOOD CALLING YOU TO EXPLORE!
YOU WOULDN'T BE THE FIRST OF US TO LEAVE THE ISLAND OF YOUR BIRTH
MIRA!
OH, MIRA, I'M SO SORRY WE PARTED BADLY PLEASE FORGIVE ME
SEPHIE, IT'S I WHO SHOULD APOLOGIZE— I WAS *HORRID* TO YOU!
AROUD?
YOU THOUGHT I'D TURNED MY BACK ON MERIDIAN. OH, IF I'D KNOWN THEN WHAT YOU'D HAD TO ENDURE ON AROUD
I SAW IT—
I SAW *PICTURES* OF THE SUNSHIP'S FIRST VOYAGE WITH PAPA AND MAMA AND YOU TWO IN THE ORIGINAL JOURNEYBOOK
I KNOW ABOUT EVENTS THERE
HOW *YOU TWO* FIRST MET AND ABOUT THE ASSASSIN
ABOUT *US?*
WELL, DON'T YOU EVER TELL—
NO. I GUESS YOU COULDN'T TELL *DAD* ABOUT THAT, COULD YOU?

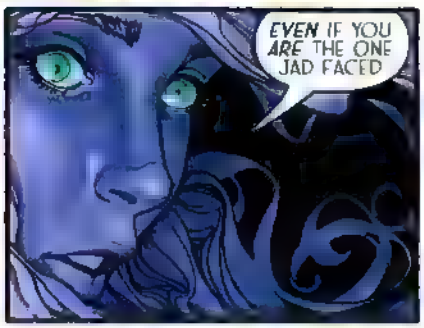

JON, TELL ME ABOUT JAD TELL ME HOW IT HAPPENED
ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO HEAR THIS?
YES
I wasn't there when Jad died
I was topside battling Hann
I didn't kill Hann, I know it, no matter what others think they saw
but he has yet to return
Jon's last echoing in my ears, I traced the trail of his words
fixing things along the way

The two forces reclaiming Meridian from her invaders had surprised the Cadadorian soldiers from two directions
While my squad took the docks, Jon led our people from Beacon Notch through the center road
A tunnel weaves through Meridian's core, its molten form a legacy of the Cataclysm that launched our islands into the sky
Once secret, it's now known to all who braved that day's march
and all the dangers they encountered on their way up
GWHRRRR
GWHRRRRRRRRRR
A CAVE BEAR SURPRISED THEM THAT DAY--
ARE YOU THE ONE?

YOU'RE WOUNDED I CAN FEEL IT
HERE -
Jad, Jon's son, was helping to lead the procession


When the cave bear attacked, Jad discovered he'd gained the power to protect them
I CAN HEAL THOSE HURTS OF YOURS!
Power like mine
I'm still not entirely certain how I gave it to him

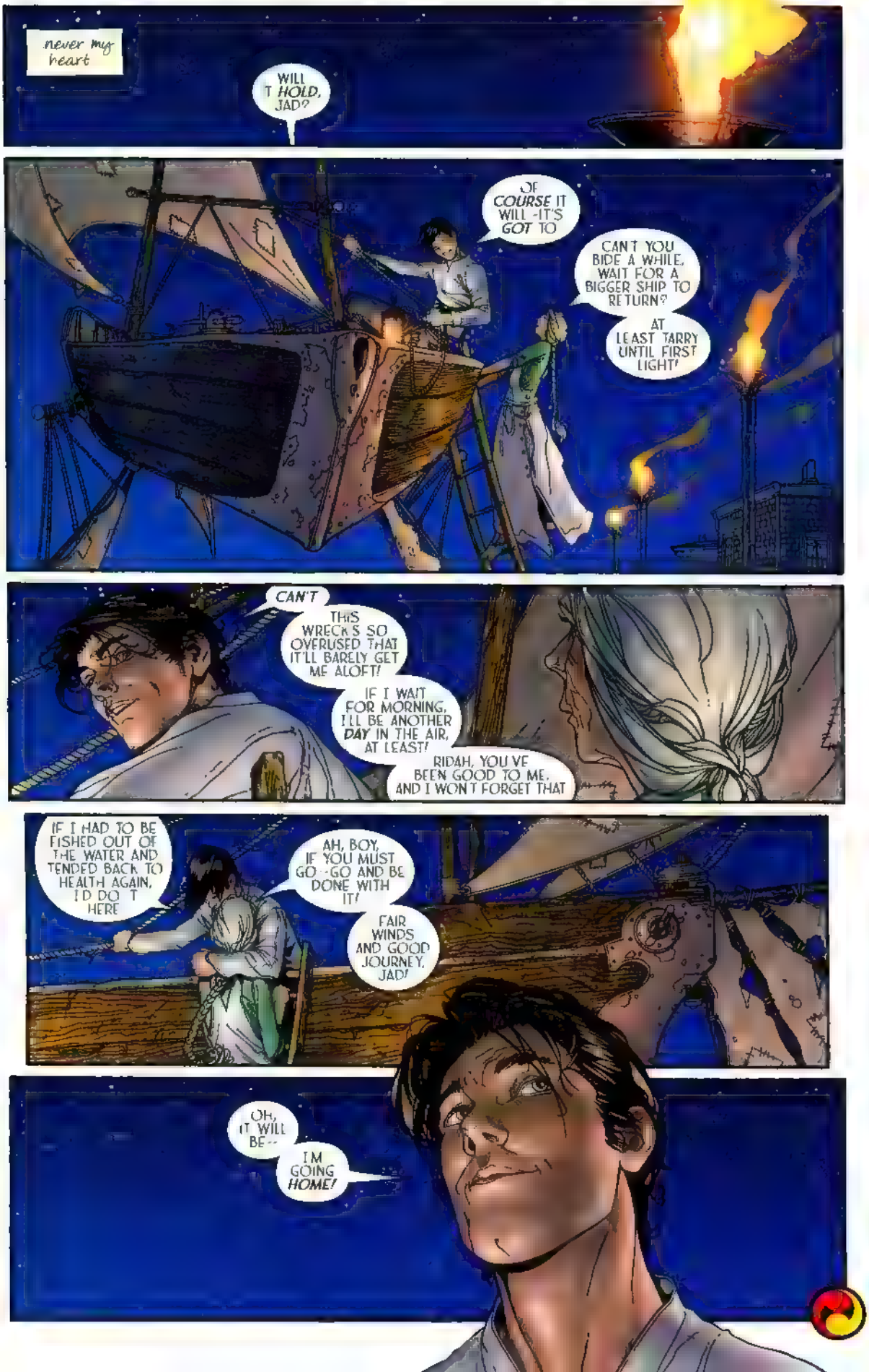
BETTER?
I'M GLAD
EVEN IF
Jad overpowered the cave bear


EVEN IF YOU ARE THE ONE JAD FACED

But there was a traitor among the Meridianites-- a woman, also powerful
They fought
BEFORE
Jad fell to his death

She survived to become the Minister of Cadador
I don't know where her power comes from
Did Liahn share his with her the way I'd shared mine with Jad?
Repairing Meridian would do nothing to ease the pain of Jad's absence
But it was my island
My world!
My responsibility to protect and preserve

I never, ever thought I'd be saying goodbye to my island
Meridian, the heart of my world
Seeing it then
from a small distance removed
made me realize for the first time that the most important of the sky islands to me, was relatively among her sister islands
so very small!
My dear Meridian
just a tiny part of the sky, just one among many islands, one small part of the world
one world among many
was what the Muse said true?
Might I have to leave, not only my island
but my world?
So I was leaving Meridian again, racing with questions toward a place that might hold answers
But only my body would leave


never my heart
WILL IT HOLD, JAD?
OF COURSE IT WILL -IT'S GOT TO
CAN'T YOU BIDE A WHILE, WAIT FOR A BIGGER SHIP TO RETURN?
AT LEAST TARRY UNTIL FIRST LIGHT!
CAN'T
THIS WRECK'S SO OVERUSED THAT IT'LL BARELY GET ME ALOFT!
IF I WAIT FOR MORNING, I'LL BE ANOTHER DAY IN THE AIR, AT LEAST!
RIDAH, YOU'VE BEEN GOOD TO ME, AND I WON'T FORGET THAT
IF I HAD TO BE FISHED OUT OF THE WATER AND TENDED BACK TO HEALTH AGAIN, I'D DO IT HERE
AH, BOY, IF YOU MUST GO -GO AND BE DONE WITH IT!
FAIR WINDS AND GOOD JOURNEY, JAD!
OH, IT WILL BE--
I'M GOING HOME!

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MERIDIAN™

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Far away on the world of Demetria,

explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

One of these islands is Meridian, home of shipbuilders and Sephie. Sephie has become the Minister of Meridian after her father Turos' death. Her uncle Ilahn is the Minister of the rich city-state of Cadador, which controls most of the shipping and trade on Demetria.

A mysterious force has endowed both Sephie and Ilahn with power – opposing forces – Ilahn's destruction versus Sephie's renewal.

Ilahn wants to control Sephie – and Meridian – but Sephie has been fighting to resist Ilahn's control of herself and Demetria's commerce. The conflict between them erupts into a battle, during which Ilahn disappears...apparently dead at Sephie's hands. Sephie takes control of Cadador, but the Ministry is taken from her by Reesha Teramu. The sunship's mission continues peacefully, with Sephie unaware that Ilahn has secretly resurfaced in Cadador but is content to leave Reesha operating as Minister in order to covertly pursue his vendetta against Sephie.

In a visit from the Muse of Giatan, Sephie learns that she has a role to play in a greater conflict. This colors her return to Meridian, a quick visit to repair old friendships and reflect on the cost of her mission. Meanwhile, Ilahn learns how to move from one point to another instantaneously with the help of a small invention and an enormous will.

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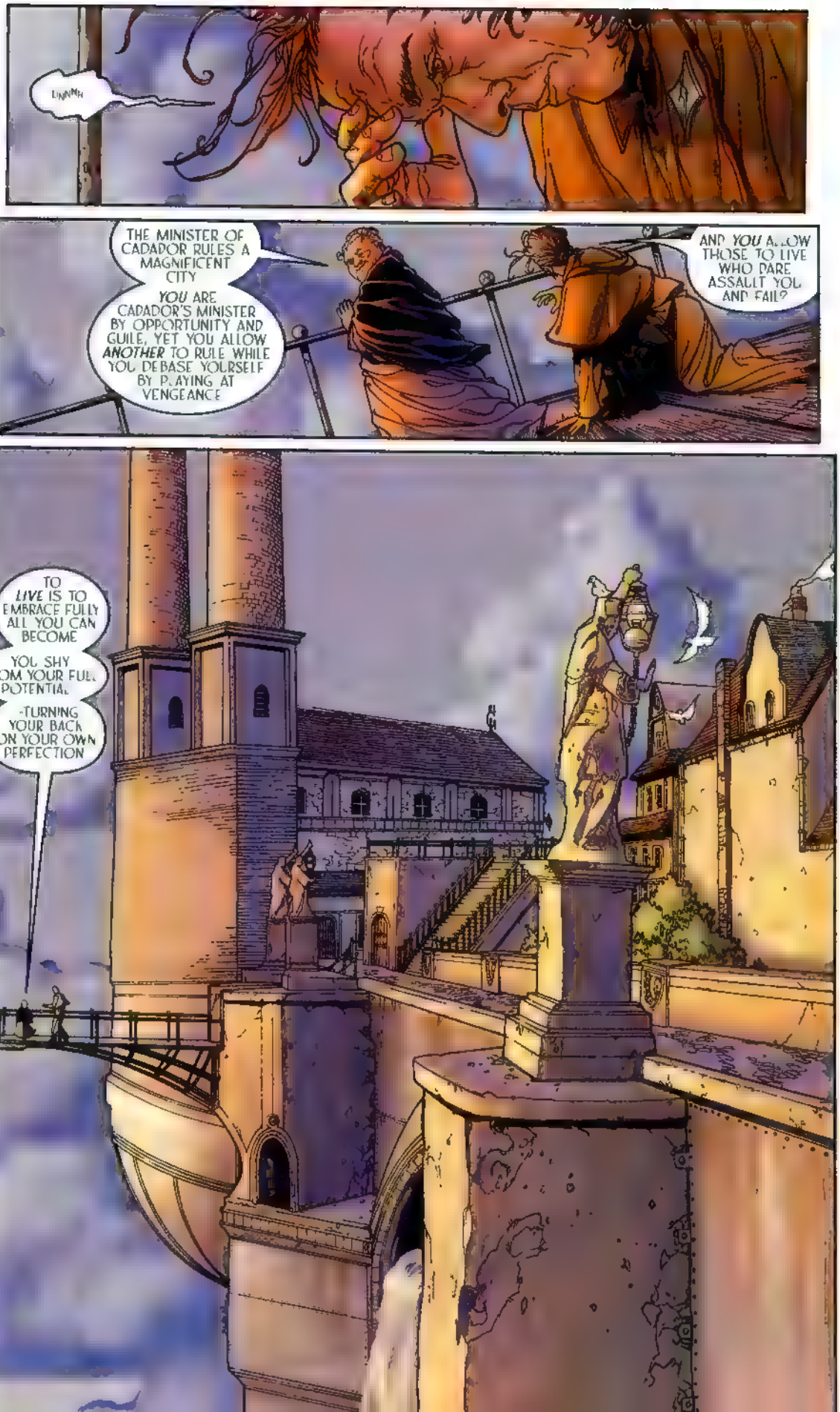
IT TAKES TIME, STUDY, *PREPARATION*, AND THE REQUISITE FORCE OF *WILL* TO BE A GREAT MINISTER
ONE CANNOT PROPERLY GUIDE THE GROWTH OF AN ISLAND JUST BECAUSE ONE *WISHES* TO!
FOR THAT GIRL TO *IMAGINE* THAT SHE COULD MANAGE AN ISLAND LIKE *CADADOR* WITH ONLY THE MEAGER INSTRUCTION I'D BEGUN TO GIVE HER IS JUST *LUDICROUS!*
SHE WAS RAISED BY THE MILKSOPS OF MERIDIAN!
MY BROTHER HAD SCARCELY BEGUN HER PREPARATION TO RULE HIS *OWN* ISLAND, MUCH LESS *CADADOR!*
YET SHE THOUGHT HERSELF CAPABLE OF ASSUMING THE MINISTRY OF *MY* ISLAND.
IT WILL TAKE MONTHS TO SMOOTH OVER THE DAMAGE SHE DID TO CADADOR'S TRADE IN LESS THAN A WEEK, EVEN IGNORING THE LOSS OF TWO TRADE SHIPS AND PROVISIONS FOR THOSE GREEDY IRONWORKERS
THE PRICE OF MY REVENGE WILL BE HIGH

ALTHOUGH THE DAY OF ITS EXACTING MUST WAIT
WHY DELAY, MINISTER ILAHN?
WHAT DO YOU GAIN BY FAILING TO TEST YOURSELF AGAINST THE OTHER SGIL BEARER?
HER *RUIN!*
BECAUSE SHE HAS NOT *EARNED* THE RELEASE OF A QUICK AND EASY DEATH!
SHE MUST BE FORCED TO KNOW AND FACE THE DISASTROUS RESULT OF HER AUDACIOUS TREACHERY!

SHE MUST *NOT*, AT ALL COSTS, BE ALLOWED TO *SUCCEED*
IT WOULD BE A TRAVESTY OF GOOD BUSINESS, MOCKING EVERYTHING RIGHT AND PROPER AS KNOWN TO A MATURE CIVILIZATION
BUT *YOU* WOULD NOT BE FAMILIAR WITH THE NUANCES OF DEMETRIA'S TRADE, MUSE
IF I AM NOT INCORRECT, THIS WORLD IS *NOT* YOUR OWN, IS IT?
ALTHOUGH I FAIL TO COMPREHEND *WHY*, I AM FULLY CONSCIOUS THAT YOUR EVERY MOVE IS INTENDED TO PLACE ME IN GREATER CONFLICT WITH MY NIECE
YOU ARE AN INSTIGATOR WITH SOME MOTIVE BEYOND THE PLEASURE OF PITTING ME AGAINST SEPHIE
TELL ME MUSE
WHAT GOAL *DO* YOU HAVE IN MIND FOR ME ?

AND WHAT GIVES *YOU* THE RIGHT TO TRY TO ***CONTROL*** ME?

I FEEL NOTHING FROM YOU?
YOUR MIGHT IS LOCKED AGAINST ME!
I'LL
YOU'LL DO NOTHING TO ME, LITTLE SIGIL BEARER
MY POWER IS NOT YOURS TO STEAL
I SHALL NOT FALTER MUSE
I AM YOUNGER AND STRONGER MY WILL--
YOUR WILL?
YOUR WILL, MINSTER OF CADAPOR, IS A PUNY THING
COMPARE T


UNNNH
THE MINISTER OF CADADOR RULES A MAGNIFICENT CITY
YOU ARE CADADOR'S MINISTER BY OPPORTUNITY AND GUILE, YET YOU ALLOW ANOTHER TO RULE WHILE YOU DEBASE YOURSELF BY PLAYING AT VENGEANCE
AND YOU ALLOW THOSE TO LIVE WHO DARE ASSAULT YOU AND FAIL?
TO LIVE IS TO EMBRACE FULLY ALL YOU CAN BECOME
YOU SHY FROM YOUR FULL POTENTIAL
-TURNING YOUR BACK ON YOUR OWN PERFECTION

IF I CONDONE YOUR INSULT, ILAHN, DO NOT PERCEIVE YOURSELF THAT I ALLOW YOU MORE THAN THE OTHERS
IT IS MERELY THAT YOU ARE OF NO USE TO ME DEAD
BUT IF YOU CONTINUE TO SQUANDER YOUR GIFT-
YOU WILL KNOW A MEASURE OF MY TRUE STRENGTH
APPLIED TO *MOTIVATE* YOU
YOU TAKE PRIDE AT BEING ABLE TO NAVIGATE CADADOR'S WIDTH WITH A THOUGHT?
YOU THOUGHT THAT A FITTING TEST FOR A SIGIL BEARER?
LOOK
SEE A WORLD LARGER THAN YOUR OWN
STRETCH YOUR VISION NOT STREET TO STREET, BUT ISLAND TO ISLAND!
IF *YOU* BELIEVE ME CAPABLE OF SUCH A FEAT MUSE
I *ACCEPT* YOUR CHALLENGE.
TEST AWAY
JUST ALLOW ME TO CALCULATE THE COORDINATES--
THE MINISTER OF CADADOR MISUNDERSTANDS *DISTANCE* IS NOT YOUR TEST
THIS IS

URK!
NNNGH!
YOU CLAIMED I WAS OF NO USE *DEAD*, YOU INFURIATING MUSE
SO THERE MUST BE SOME SOLUTION TO MY DILEMMA!
I MUST *MEET* DEATH

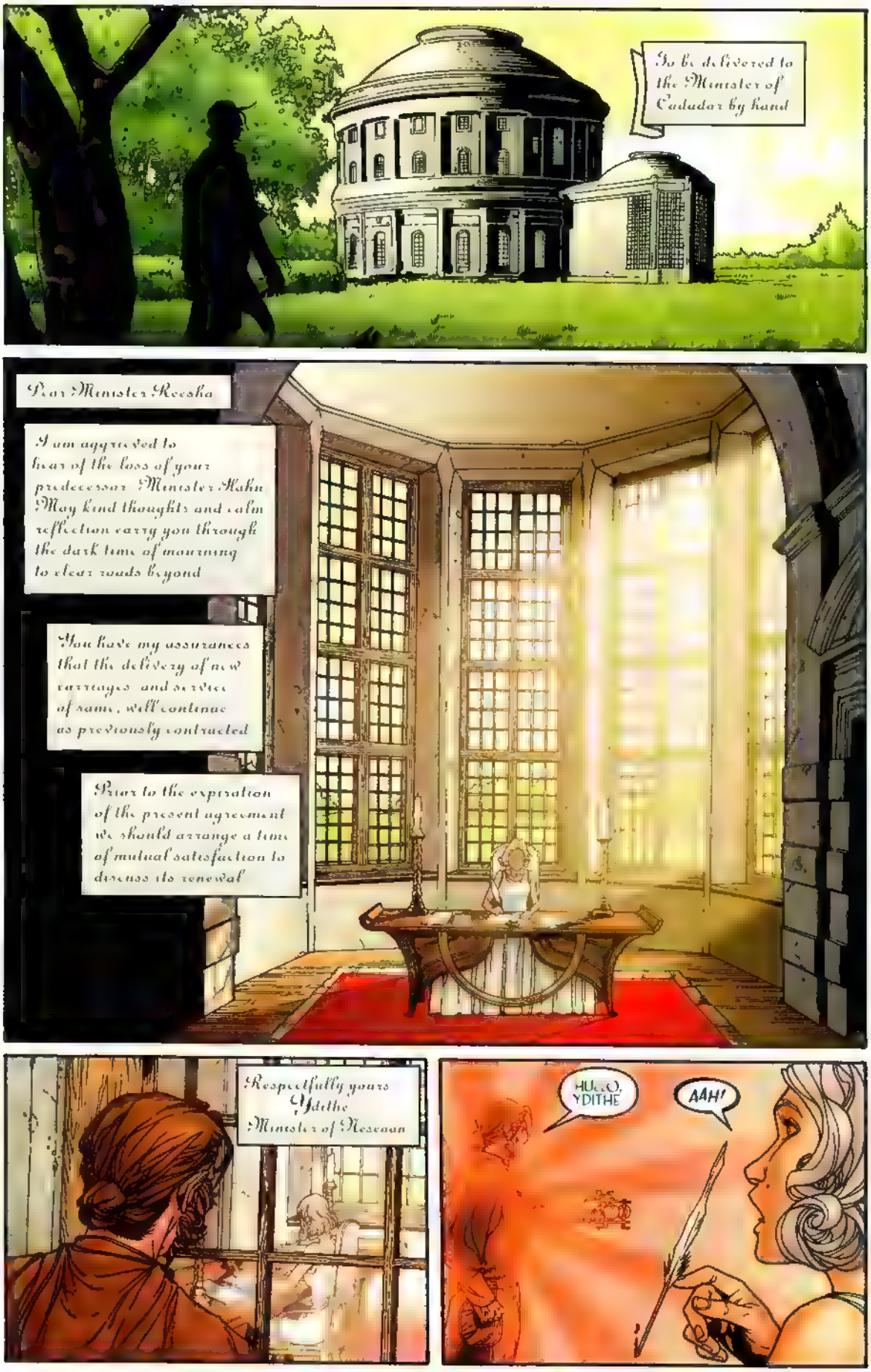
AND
DESTROY

IF THAT VEXATIOUS NIECE OF MINE CAN MANEUVER THROUGH THE AIR WITH A PUSH
MY OWN GREATER WILL SHOULD LIKEWISE FORCE OBEDIENCE OF THE SURROUNDING ELEMENTS TO ME
AAAH
SUCCESS

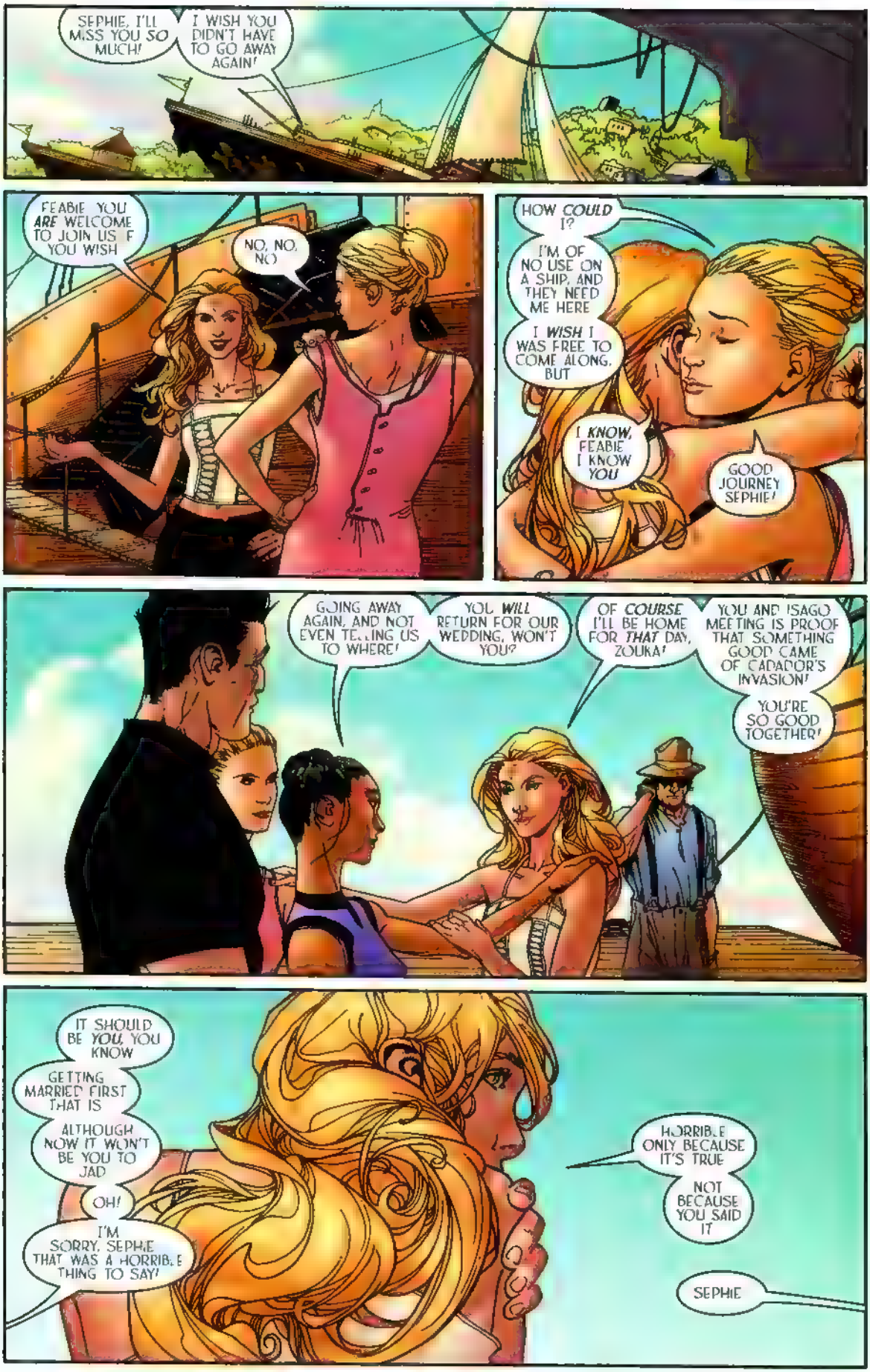
IS *THIS* WHAT YOU INTENDED ME TO DISCOVER, MUSE?
A HARSH LESSON GAINED THROUGH FRIGHT AND PAIN
WHAT STRANGE IMPULSE NAVIGATES YOUR MEDDLING, YOU ENIGMATIC ORACLE?
I'D RESENT YOUR ROUGH HANDLING--
WERE IT NOT ENTIRELY TO MY BENEFIT
YOU HAVE OPENED UP THE WORLD TO ME

THE FIRST OF MANY

WHERE DID THAT MAN COME FROM?
THAT'S NOT--BUT HE SO RESEMBLES ?
ILAHN OF CADADOR
DO I KNOW YOU GENTLEMEN?
NO, IT COULDN'T BE
TWO GOOD EYES
TOO YOUNG
"EVERYONE KNOWS ILAHN HAS ONE SCARRED ONE"


To be delivered to the Minister of Caladar by hand
Dear Minister Reesha
I am aggrieved to hear of the loss of your predecessor Minister Makin May kind thoughts and calm reflection carry you through the dark time of mourning to clear roads beyond
You have my assurances that the delivery of new carriages and service of same, will continue as previously contracted
Prior to the expiration of the present agreement we should arrange a time of mutual satisfaction to discuss its renewal
Respectfully yours Ydithe Minister of Neseaan
HUGO, YDITHE
AAH!

WHO ARE YOU?
BY THE STARS
ILAHN?
YOUR FACE
YOUR EYE
ILAHN, HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?
I
YOU ?
YDITHE ?
I IMAGINE IT'S QUITE THE TALE
YOU MUST TELL ME ALL ABOUT IT
AH YES
YOU HAVE HEARD TELL OF WHEN MY NIECE AND I WERE MARKED?
DID YOU ALSO HEAR THAT THE SILLY LITTLE CHILD HAS EXPLOITED THE EVENT IN HER CAMPAIGN TO BRUTALIZE THE ECONOMY OF ALL DEMETRIA?
EVEN NOW, SEPHIE IS PLOTTING OUR CONTINUING CORRUPTION


SEPHIE, I'LL MISS YOU SO MUCH!
I WISH YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO GO AWAY AGAIN!
FEABIE YOU ARE WELCOME TO JOIN US IF YOU WISH
NO, NO, NO
HOW COULD I?
I'M OF NO USE ON A SHIP, AND THEY NEED ME HERE
I WISH I WAS FREE TO COME ALONG, BUT
I KNOW, FEABIE I KNOW YOU
GOOD JOURNEY SEPHIE!
GOING AWAY AGAIN, AND NOT EVEN TELLING US TO WHERE!
YOU WILL RETURN FOR OUR WEDDING, WON'T YOU?
OF COURSE I'LL BE HOME FOR THAT DAY, ZOUKA!
YOU AND ISAGO MEETING IS PROOF THAT SOMETHING GOOD CAME OF CADADOR'S INVASION!
YOU'RE SO GOOD TOGETHER!
IT SHOULD BE YOU, YOU KNOW
GETTING MARRIED FIRST THAT IS
ALTHOUGH NOW IT WON'T BE YOU TO JAD
OH!
I'M SORRY, SEPHIE THAT WAS A HORRIBLE THING TO SAY!
HORRIBLE ONLY BECAUSE IT'S TRUE
NOT BECAUSE YOU SAID IT
SEPHIE

OH, SEPHIE - YOU TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF ON THAT SHIP OF STRANGERS, G.R.!
MY CREW?
WE MAY ALL BE A LITTLE STRANGE, BUT WE'RE NOT STRANGERS, NOT ANYMORE
MAYBE SO, BUT YOU KEEP A KEEN EYE OUT FOR *THAT* YOUNG MAN
THE WAY HE WATCHES YOU IS DISTURBING

CRENNER?
YOU'RE SUSPICIOUS OF CRENNER?
I DON'T THINK I'D TRUST HIM EASILY IF I WERE YOU
OH JON
CRENNER'S PERFECTLY SAFE!
OH?
I'M SAFER WITH HIM THAN I WOULD BE WITH--
WOULD HAVE BEEN WITH JAD
WORRY ABOUT MERIDIAN, JON, NOT ME
GOOD JOURNEY!
WE'LL BE BACK WITH WONDERFUL TALES AND NEW ALLIES!
Words, even casually spoken, have power
Sometimes the things you say take root, growing into the impetus for action, with you all the while unaware

Sometimes we determine things to be true that are not, and that determination sets our mind on a new course it might otherwise never have traveled
Old roads are suddenly abandoned
Old lives ended
WHOA!
WHERE'D THESE SHEARS SPRING FROM?
THERE SHOULD BE NOTHING BUT CLEAR SKY BETWEEN ME AND HOME!
I LEAVE FOR A FEW WEEKS AND MERIDIAN'S SKIES CHANGE FLAVOR?
LOOKS LIKE IT'S NOT JUST THE SEAS THAT HAVE GONE TOXIC!

TAKE SIGHT

CONCENTRATE

STEP

IT BECOMES *EASIER* WITH EACH LEAP

SUCH AN ODD SENSATION TO STEP BETWEEN CLOUDS AS EASILY AS PLACING EACH FOOT ALONG A CONTINUOUS PATHWAY

MAKING A THOROUGHFARE OF AIR TROUBLED BY MY DESTRUCTIVE NATURE "

A TRUE ROAD TO AND OF RUIN
SO, MUSE, DID I LEARN ALL YOU'D HOPED?
OR DID I THWART YOUR INTENTION TO RID YOURSELF OF A WEAK SUBJECT?
HAVING PROVEN MY STRENGTH, I INSIST YOU NOT KEEP ME IN THE DARK WHERE YOUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE ARE CONCERNED!
TCHK!
FORGIVE ME, MUSE
I PRESUME TOO MUCH, MAKING DEMANDS OF YOU.
BUT SHOULD YOU NEED A WILLING PARTNER IN YOUR ENDEAVORS
I SHALL MAKE MYSELF YOUR WILLING VASSAL

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Sephie is now on her way to the island of Nescoan, while Ilahn has gone from learning how to transport himself across Cadador to learning how to transport himself between islands. The Muse, who pushed Ilahn to this knowledge, now appears to be favoring the more ambitious Sigil-Bearer. Meanwhile, Sephie's first love, Jad, battles the winds to reach Meridian while another new romance may be brewing...

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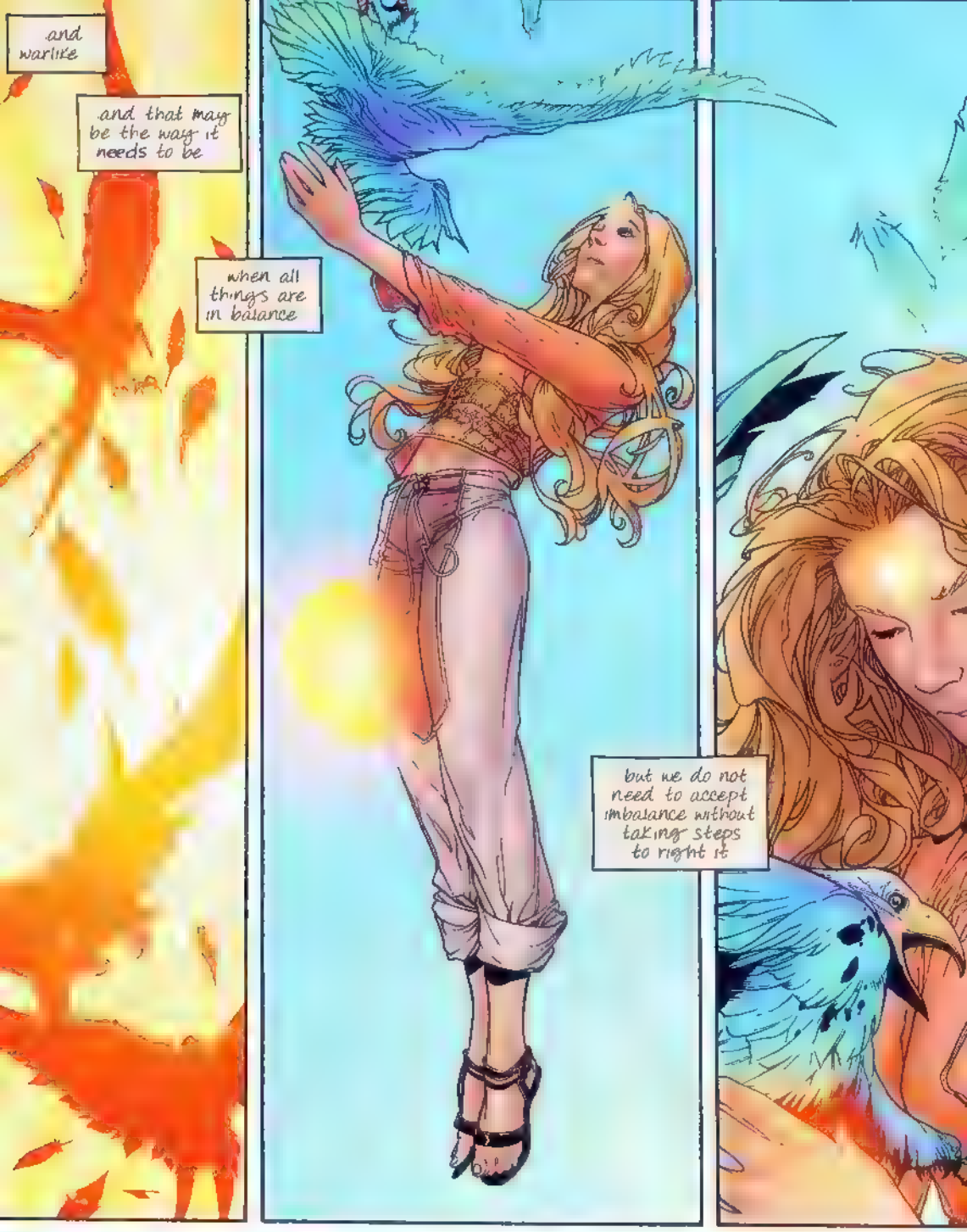
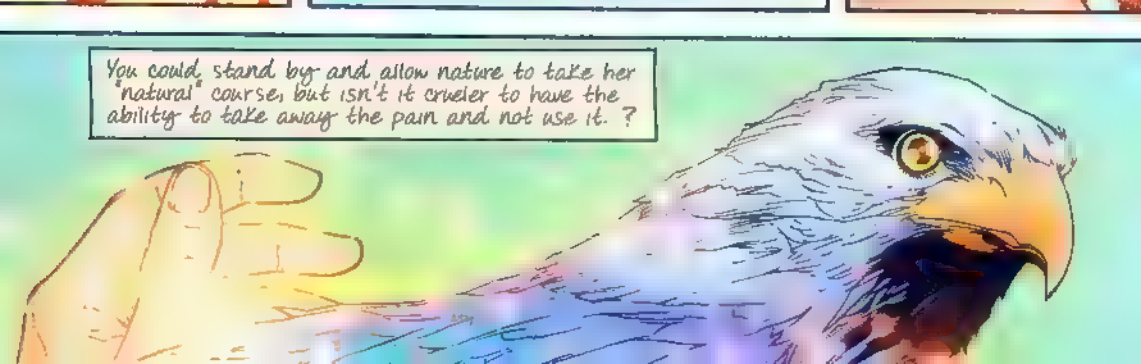
Some say warfare is our natural state, not peace
For evidence they look to the cycle of predator and prey found everywhere in nature
Yes animals kill and eat each other--that's the way of it
It may seem unnecessarily cruel
uncaring


and warlike
and that may be the way it needs to be
when all things are in balance
but we do not need to accept imbalance without taking steps to right it


You could stand by and allow nature to take her "natural" course, but isn't it crueler to have the ability to take away the pain and not use it. ?

especially when it is dominance, not survival, that is at stake

From what the Muse had told me, I knew it was intended that I would fight. That some great conflict was looming, and my participation would be the price for the power that allowed me to change my own world.

I knew I would

if I must

become a warrior

but I would never consider it a reflection of my true nature
WE'RE ONLY HOURS AWAY!
WHICH OUR LOGS, SIGHTS, AND COMPASS COULD NEVER HAVE TOLD US, RIGHT?
DID THEY ALSO FORESCAST CLEAR SKIES AND BRIGHT WINDS, RASE?
BECAUSE THAT'S ALL I SEE AHEAD!
SHE LIKES TO FLY, RASE
OH, HOW COULD YOU TWO HAVE LIVED YOUR LIVES UNDERGROUND AWAY FROM THE SKY?
WE DON'T CHOOSE THE LAND WE'RE BORN TO, SEPHIE
SO TRUE
KKAW
OH! YOU AGAIN?
AGAIN?
SO, YOU'VE BEEN FLYING OFF TO SPEND TIME WITH THIS NEW GUY, EH...?

"...OR DO MEN ALWAYS CHASE AFTER YOU?"
HEY RANAN
TIE ME OFF?
SURELY
THANKS FOR THE ASSIST, RANAN
HAPPY TO HELP, JAD
JAD ?
HEY, HOW 'BOUT THAT
NOT DEAD AFTER ALL

LEURECE!
JAD'S COME HOME!
JAD!
JAD?
SPIRITS!
YOU BEEN DRINKIN', RANAN?
JAD?!
HURRAY!
JAD'S BACK!

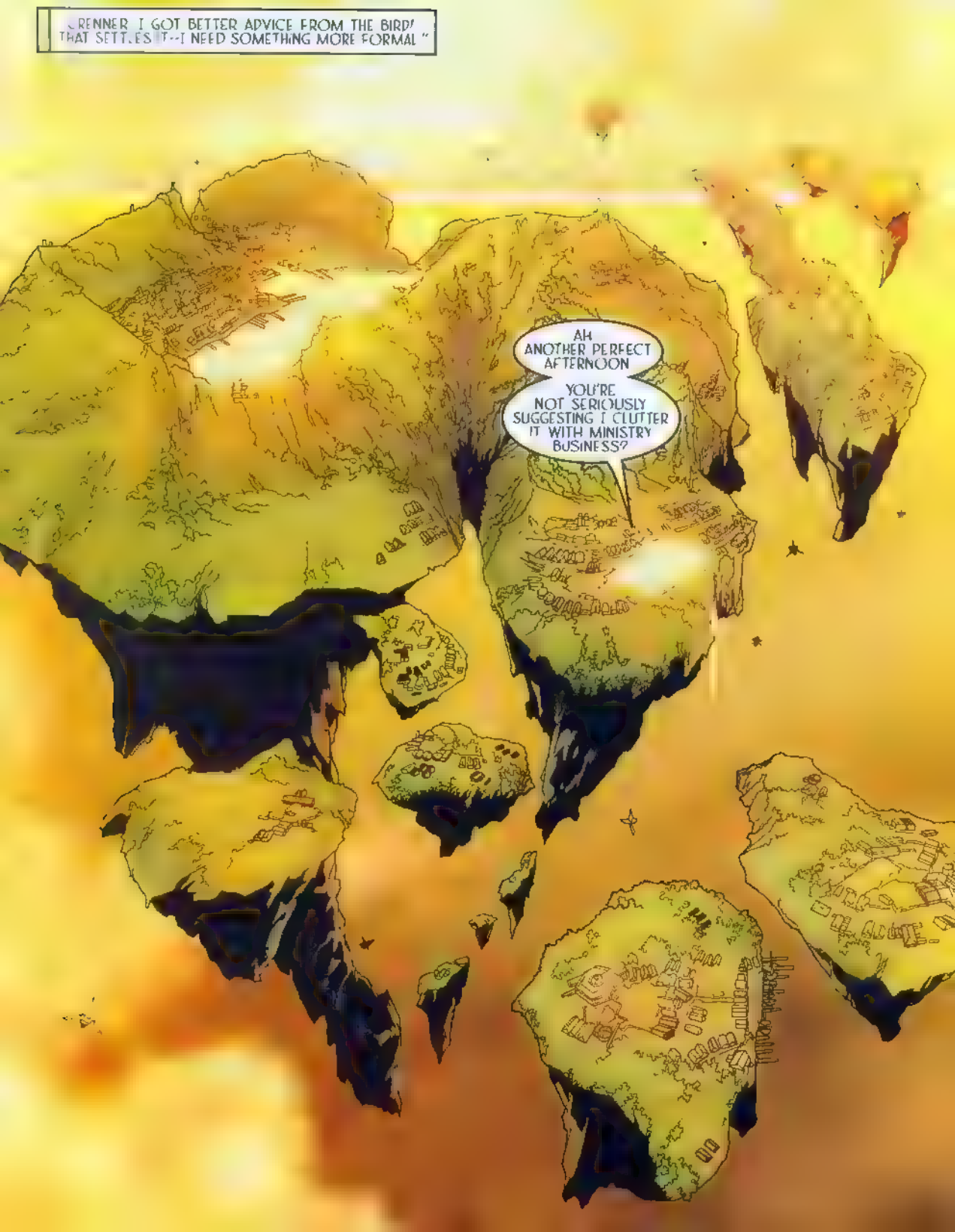
JAD'S BACK!
HE'S NOT DEAD!
JAD
MASTER TAKARTY!
WHAT'S GOT YOU SO EXCITED TODWEIL?
IT'S JAD--
HE'S COME HOME!
WHAT?
YOU DON'T MEAN
NOT A BODY!
IT'S JAD!
ALL ALIVE!
BY THE STARS

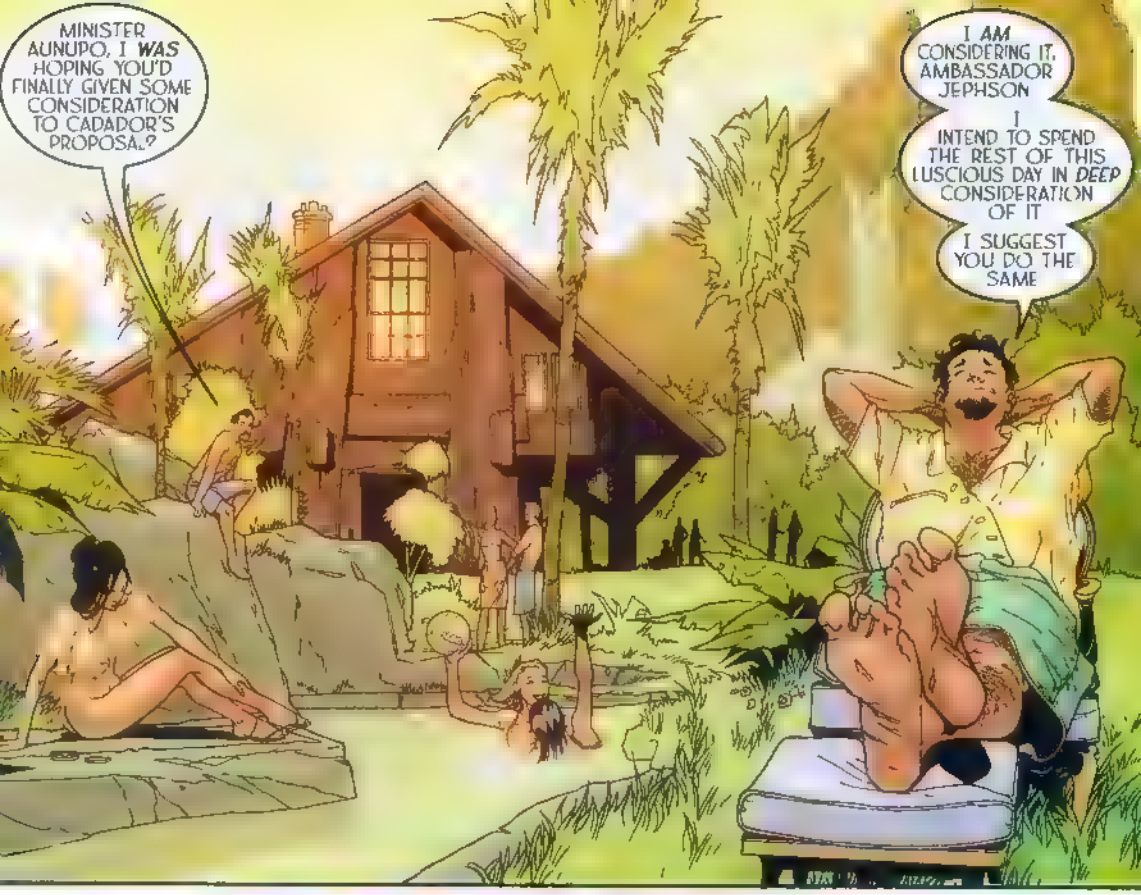
HOW'D YOU DO IT, JAD?
ISAGO, WHO CARES?
I'M SO GLAD TO SEE YOU, JAD!
YOU'LL HAVE TO TELL US ALL ABOUT IT, BOY -
JAD!
UFF FEABIE!
JAD!
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT! YOU'RE ALIVE!
I WON'T BE IF YOU KNOCK ME OFF THE EDGE, FEABS
UH LET GO?
JAD
MY BOY'S COME HOME

DAD!
TAD ?
WAIT 'TIL YOU HEAR WHAT I DID DOWN BELOW!
OH, YOU ARE GOING TO BE SO--
JAD
EVERYONE WORK'S DONE FOR THE DAY! SPREAD THE WORD TO GATHER FOR A WELCOME HOME FEAST!
SO DAD, WHERE'S *SEPHIE*?
GONE AGA.N, JAD
A LOT'S HAPPENED SINCE YOU LEFT
JAD, SEPHIE *LEFT* US!
SHE'S JOURNEYED OFF TO OTHER ISLANDS WITH HER SHIP FRIENDS!
SHE HAD MORE IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO THAN STAY HERE!
AND SHE *WOULDN'T* EVEN SAY WHERE SHE WAS GOING BECAUSE SHE DOESN'T WANT *CADADOR* TO HEAR ABOUT HER PLANS!
SHE ONLY CARES ABOUT HER *MISSION*!

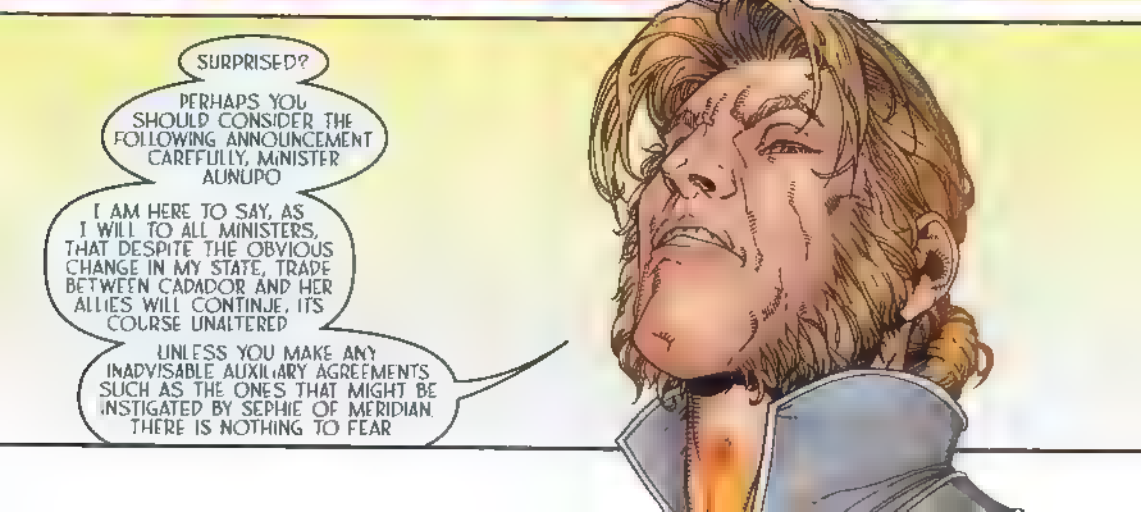
IT WILL BE ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT ON NESCOAN TO MAKE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION
IT'S A VERY FORMAL ISLAND. ITS PEOPLE TEND TO BE QUIET AND SUBTLE
NESCOAN MAKES THE CARRIAGES USED EVERYWHERE, WHICH HAS NETTED THEM GREAT WEALTH
THEY HAVE COME TO CONFUSE MONEY WITH QUALITY.
--WHICH MEANS THEY ONLY RESPECT OTHERS IF THEY'RE SUITABLY PROSPEROUS
THEY CARE SO MUCH ABOUT APPEARANCES
IF I DON'T APPEAR TO BE THE LEADER OF AS EQUALLY PROSPEROUS A TRADE SYNDICATE AS CADADOR'S, THEN MINISTER YDITHE WON'T GIVE SERIOUS CONSIDERATION TO MY PROPOSAL
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO WEAR
YOU'RE LUCKY YOU DON'T NEED TO WORRY ABOUT THESE THINGS
SEPHIE?
WHAT THINGS?
AAAH!

WHO ARE YOU TALKING TO?
HIM.
YOU'RE TALKING TO THE BIRD
AND HE'S NOT OFFERING MUCH ADVICE, SO YOU CAN HELP
YOU'RE A MINISTER-TO-BE SURELY YOU'VE HAD TO DEAL WITH MATTERS OF STATE?
DOES THIS LOOK SUITABLE FOR AN AFTERNOON ARRIVAL?
IT'S BEAUTIFUL
OH I AH I WANTED TO MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION
"SEPHIE YOU'D MAKE A GOOD IMPRESS ON ANYWHERE."


...RENNER I GOT BETTER ADVICE FROM THE BIRD! THAT SETTLES IT--I NEED SOMETHING MORE FORMAL"
AH ANOTHER PERFECT AFTERNOON
YOU'RE NOT SERIOUSLY SUGGESTING I CLUTTER IT WITH MINISTRY BUSINESS?

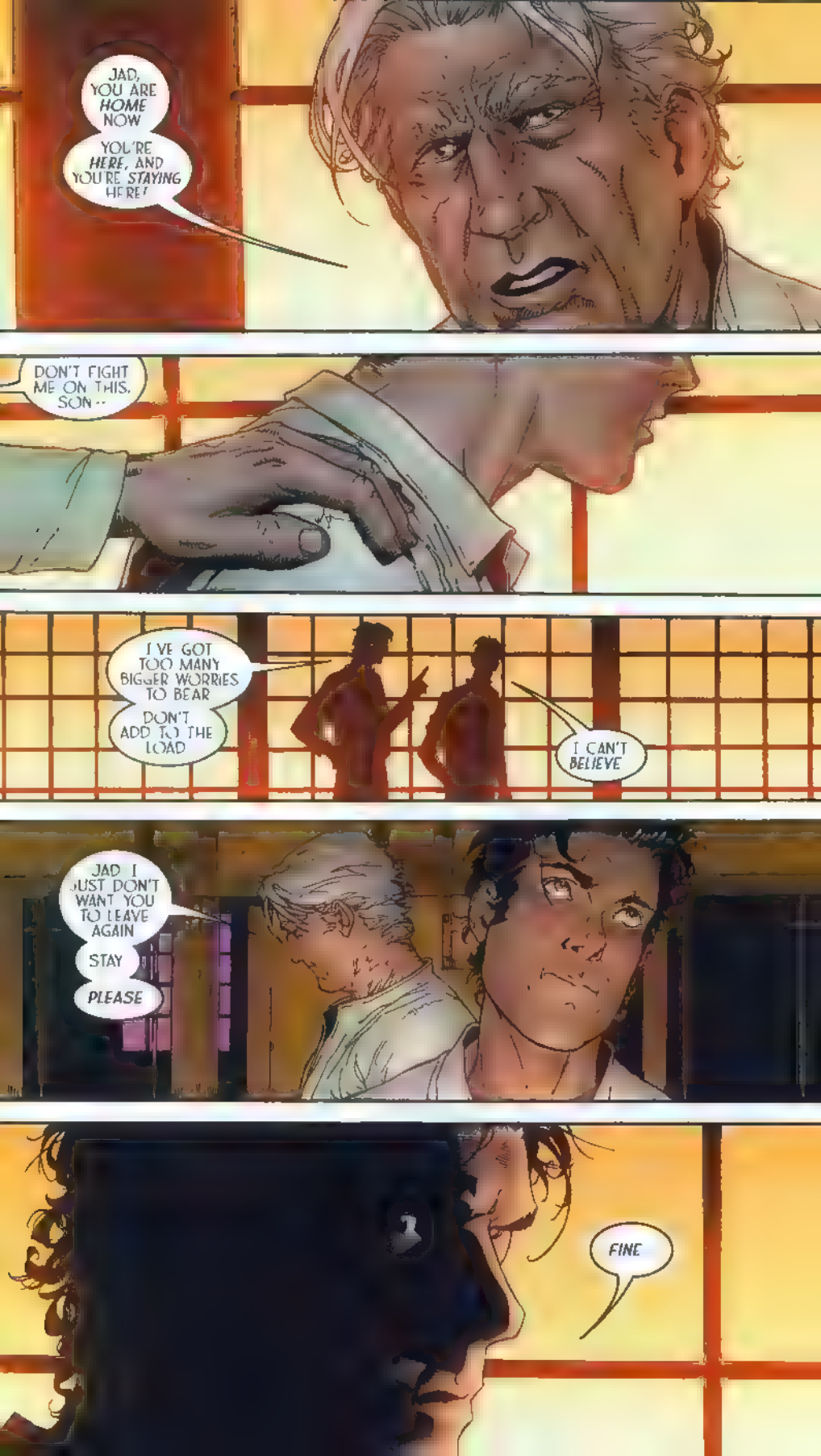

MINISTER AUNUPO, I *WAS* HOPING YOU'D FINALLY GIVEN SOME CONSIDERATION TO CADADOR'S PROPOSA..?
I *AM* CONSIDERING IT, AMBASSADOR JEPHSON
I INTEND TO SPEND THE REST OF THIS LUSCIOUS DAY IN *DEEP* CONSIDERATION OF IT
I SUGGEST YOU DO THE SAME

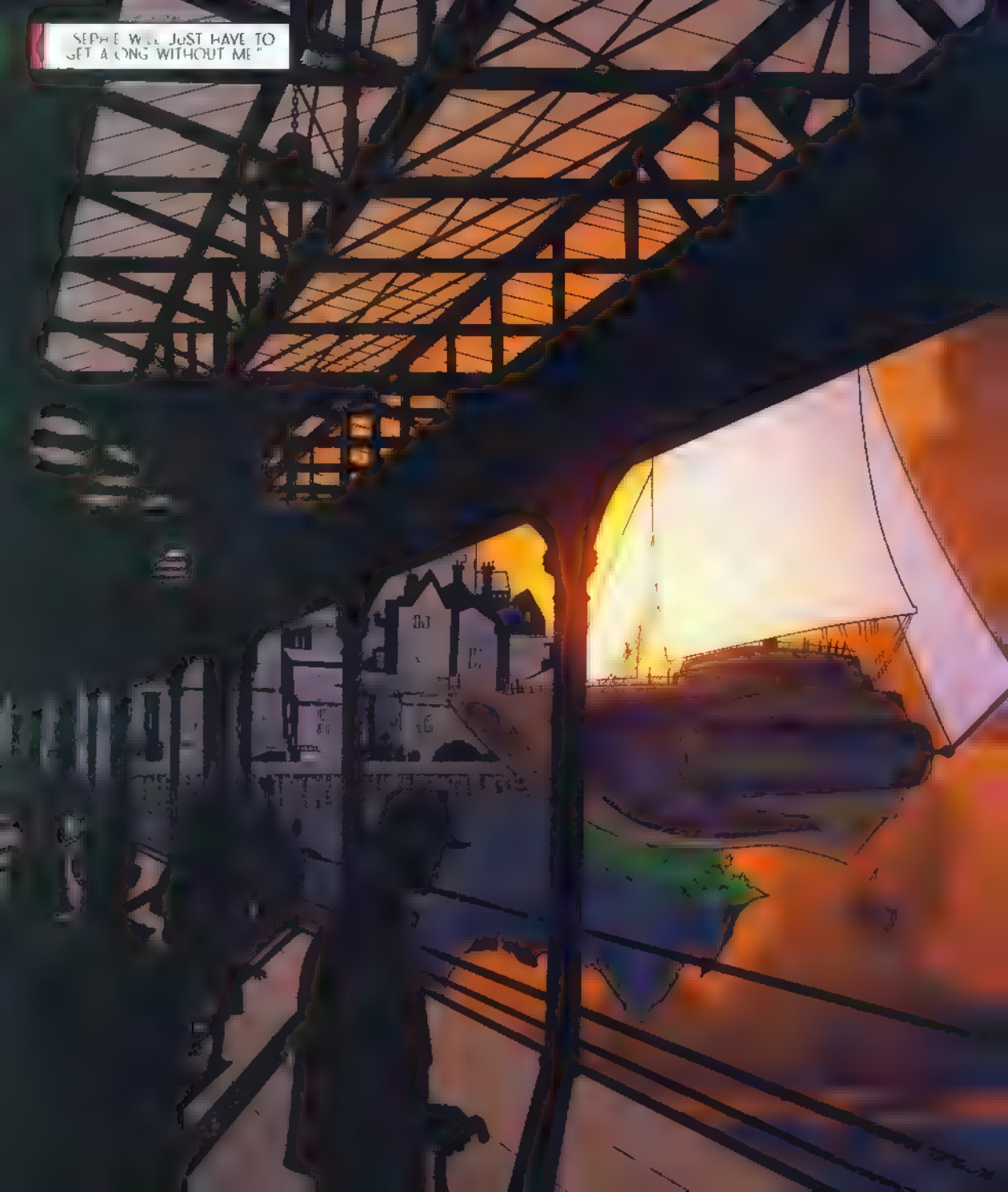
THAT CONTRACT, AND MY AMBASSADOR, SHOULD HAVE BEEN BACK TO CADADOR WEEKS AGO
ILAHN?


SURPRISED?
PERHAPS YOU SHOULD CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING ANNOUNCEMENT CAREFULLY, MINISTER AUNUPO
I AM HERE TO SAY, AS I WILL TO ALL MINISTERS, THAT DESPITE THE OBVIOUS CHANGE IN MY STATE, TRADE BETWEEN CADADOR AND HER ALLIES WILL CONTINJE, ITS COURSE UNALTERED
UNLESS YOU MAKE ANY INADVISABLE AUXILIARY AGREEMENTS SUCH AS THE ONES THAT MIGHT BE INSTIGATED BY SEPHIE OF MERIDIAN, THERE IS NOTHING TO FEAR

AS I SAID, YOU NEED FEAR NO CHANGE
I KNOW ROUTINE IS INVALUABLE TO THE ACADEMICIANS OF *VYLUND*, MINISTER WILLERSEN
ALL I ASK-
IS THAT THE FINE CITIZENS OF *DURAKA* TAKE HEED OF THE UNUSUAL MANNER OF TRANSPORTATION I HAVE EMPLOYED IN THIS VISIT AND DETERMINE DURAKA'S COURSE ACCORDINGLY IF CHALLENGED BY MY RENEGADE NIECE
OR *AUBRYN* WILL HAVE TO BE CONSIDERED AN ALLY OF THE REBELLIOUS MINISTER OF MERIDIAN
IF THAT UNFORTUNATE ASSOCIATION COMES TO PASS
I'LL BE FORCED TO RENEGOTIATE ALL TRADE WITH *LISCHELLE* AND ORDER MY SHIPS TO AVOID HER PORTS
YOU *DID* HAPPEN TO HEAR OF *AKASIA'S* UNFORTUNATE TRADE DIFFICULTIES AFTER MY EMBARGO?

WHAT?
SEPHIE'S MADE ME HER REGENT, JAD
YOU'RE MY SON, AND DUTY DEMANDS YOU STAY HERE AT MY SIDE NOT GO TRAIPSING OFF AFTER SEPHIE
BUT, DAD
WHEN SHE RETURNS TO RECLAIM HER ROLE AS MINISTER, YOU TWO CAN CONFER ON FUTURE PLANS.
THEN YOU'LL BE FREE TO EXPLORE ALL YOU LIKE!
BUT DAD--!
NO BUTS, JAD
YOU HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO STAY
BUT YESTERDAY, YOU THOUGHT I WAS DEAD!
I DIDN'T HAVE ANY RESPONSIBILITY THEN!

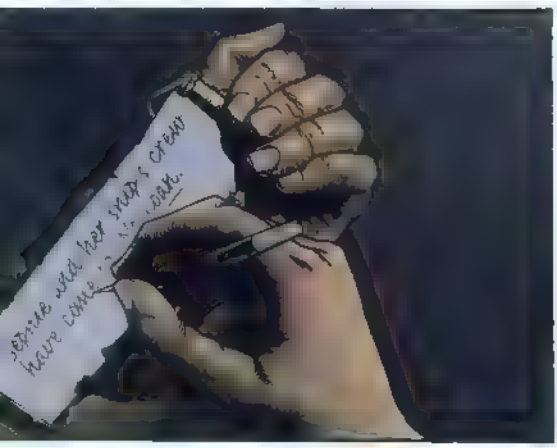

JAD, YOU ARE HOME NOW
YOU'RE HERE, AND YOU'RE STAYING HERE!
DON'T FIGHT ME ON THIS, SON --
I'VE GOT TOO MANY BIGGER WORRIES TO BEAR
DON'T ADD TO THE LOAD
I CAN'T BELIEVE
JAD I JUST DON'T WANT YOU TO LEAVE AGAIN
STAY
PLEASE
FINE


SEPHIROTH WILL JUST HAVE TO GET ALONG WITHOUT ME."

GREETINGS, HONORED REPRESENTATIVE OF THE MINISTER OF NESCOAN!
THE ISLAND OF MERIDIAN SENDS HER MINISTER TO REQUEST AN AUDIENCE WITH YDITHE, MINISTER OF NESCOAN
WILL THE MINISTER AGREE TO SUCH A MEETING?
BY ALL MEANS, THE MINISTER OF MERIDIAN IS WELCOME
IF NOT EXPECTED
THERE MAY BE A SLIGHT DELAY
WE WERE NOT MADE AWARE OF YOUR VISIT, AND WERE UNABLE TO MAKE PREPARATIONS
FOR WHICH I BEG PARDON
FOR REASONS YOU'LL NO DOUBT UNDERSTAND, MY JOURNEY PATH IS *NOT* LOGGED IN CADADOR
YOUNG
TOO YOUNG

IS SHE GONE FROM SIGHT?
ONE MINUTE MORE
NOW
LAST ONE GONE'S BUYING!
SOUTHERNERS
AND SURFACE PEOPLE
THIRSTY SURFACE PEOPLE, Y'PEA-BRAINED DOCK SQUATTERS!
IF YOU'RE GOING TO MUTTER ABOUT US, GET IT RIGHT
SO, FELLAS

WHERE'S A GOOD WATERING HOLE TO SLAKE A THIRST?
YOU'RE ALL LEAVING? YOU'VE SET NO WATCH?
YOU CAN'T JUST LEAVE YOUR PROPERTY TO OUR CARE!
YOU'VE NOT HEARD OF WHAT SEPHIE OF MERIDIAN CAN DO?
SHE CAN SNIFF OUT A THIEF FROM THREE LEAGUES DISTANT, THEN FLAIL THE FLESH FROM HIS BONES BEFORE HEALING IT UP AS NICELY AS YOU PLEASE SO NO MAN COULD SEE THE DIFFERENCE EXCEPT FOR HIM THAT FELT THE PAIN!
SO WHO'D DARE STEAL FROM HER SHIP?
I'M SURE YOU TWO GENTLEMEN WILL HELP PASS THE WORD SO NOTHING UNFORTUNATE HAPPENS
IT COULDN'T!
IT WOULDN'T!
HONDELL
HONDELL! NOW!
YOU'VE HEARD WHAT HAPPENED TO ILAHN OF CADADOR?
OUR LITTLE SEPHIE TOOK OFFENSE AT HIS TREATMENT OF US, AND NEXT YOU KNOW, PFFT!
DEAD'R THAN
APPALLING
UNNERVING
AND THIS GIANT--HE WAS ONLY A WEE LAD BEFORE SHE APPLIED HER TOUCH, AND NOW LOOK AT HIM!
I'VE GROWN TALLER THAN YOUR TALES, HONDELL!



DID THE JOB, DIDN'T IT? NO HARM'LL COME TO THE SUNSHIP NOW

NOT THAT IT WOULD HAVE WITHOUT - NESCOAN'S PRETTY QUIET

FOR *NOW* WE'VE JUST GOTTEN HERE

SWIFT WINGS AND GOOD WINDS GUIDE YOU HOME TO CADADOR, LITTLE MESSENGER

Deciding to leave my crew behind and approach Nescoan's Minister alone was not an easy decision

Even though my sigil makes me powerful, the presence of friends is also a source of strength

but there are times when the best of allies, would, with the best of intentions, be the worst possible accompaniment
This was a delicate situation
Nescoan had always been a loyal trading partner of Cadador
My mission depended on gaining strong allies in what might become a war for independence
I was hoping I could turn Nescoan away from Reesha Teramu's grasp
before Cadador's claws went any deeper
With words, though, not through force
While it might someday end in fighting
for now, the battle was done

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There's change in the winds of Demetria.

With this issue, we bid a fond farewell to Steve McNiven and Tom Simmons, off to stretch their wings on new projects (Shhhh! *Secrets!*) while Morry Hollowell leaps away to the world of Elysia in THE FIRST. My thanks to all three for a *great* run.

Next issue, Luke Ross steps in for a two-issue visit as guest penciler. And then, in issue 39, a new art team takes to these skies: Vincenco Cucca, Don Hillsman II, and Sumi Pak. (It's looking fantastic —stay tuned for sneak peeks!)

— Barbara Kesel
(same ol' writer)

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37 JULY

MERIDIAN

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Barbara Kesel
Luke Ross
James Hodgkins
Richard & Tonya Horie

Far away on the world of Demetria,

explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

One of these islands is Meridian, home of shipbuilders and Sephie. Sephie has become the Minister of Meridian after her father Turos' death. Her uncle Ilahn is the Minister of the rich city-state of Cadador, which controls most of the shipping and trade on Demetria.

A mysterious force has endowed both Sephie and Ilahn with power – opposing forces – Ilahn's destruction versus Sephie's renewal.

Ilahn wants to control Sephie – and Meridian – but Sephie has been fighting to resist Ilahn's control of herself and Demetria's commerce. The conflict between them erupts into a battle, during which Ilahn disappears...apparently dead at Sephie's hands. Sephie takes control of Cadador, but the Ministry is taken from her by Reesha Teramu. The sunship's mission continues peacefully, with Sephie unaware that Ilahn has secretly resurfaced in Cadador but is content to leave Reesha operating as Minister in order to covertly pursue his vendetta against Sephie.

After gaining a new friend, a hawk she saved from sky raptors, Sephie is repaid when the hawk intercepts a spy's message to Ilahn, gaining the sunship crew more time before their exact movements are known on Cadador. Sephie has come to the island of Nescoan, where she hopes to forge a new trade alliance with the Minister of the prominent and highly formal carriagemakers' island. Ilahn, now able to transport himself across the sky with a thought, has beaten her to Nescoan and poisoned Minister Ydithe against Sephie's mission. Meanwhile, Jad, Sephie's lost love, has reached Meridian only to find that Sephie is already gone, and he is forbidden to follow her.

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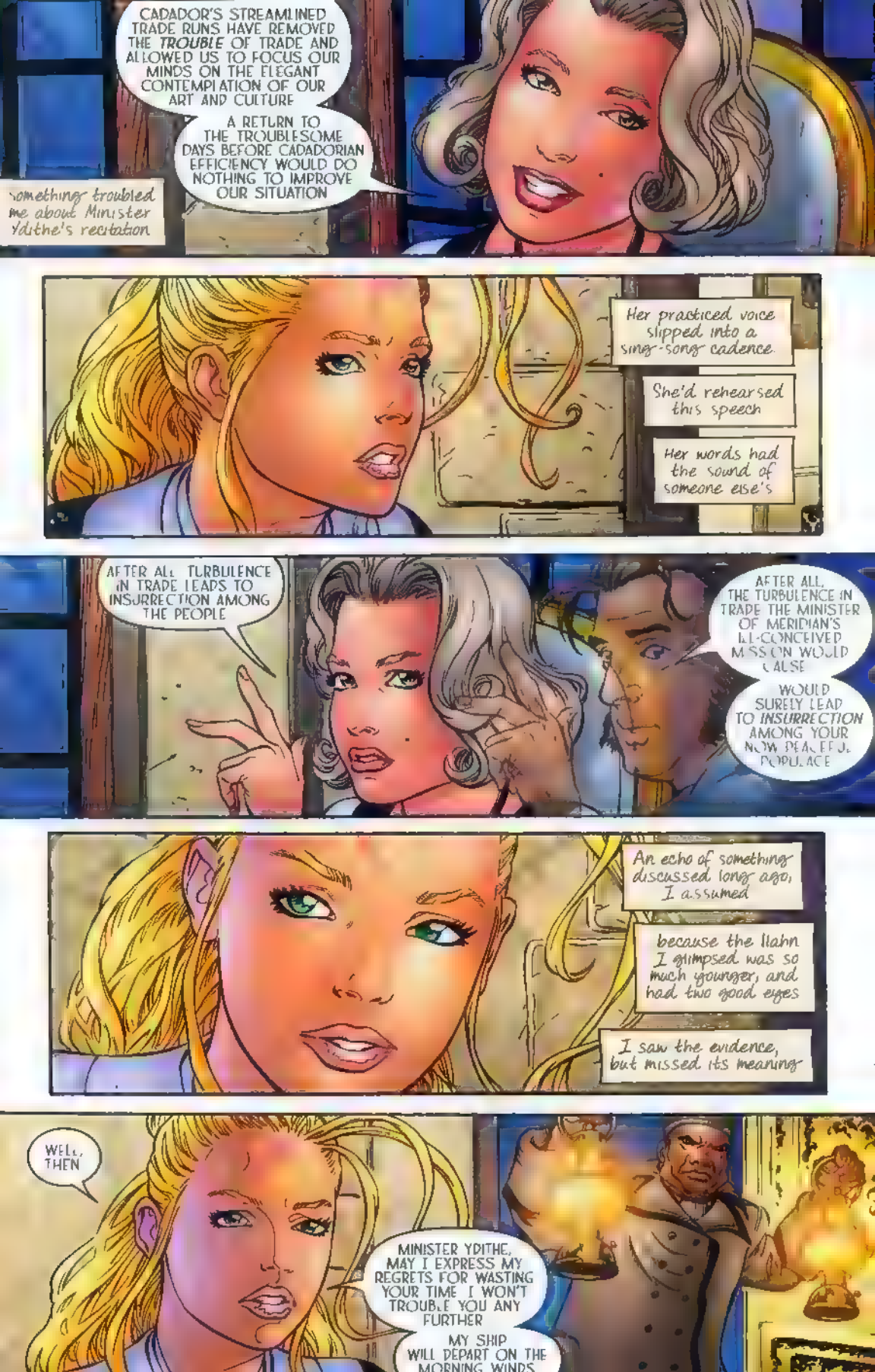
In coming to Nescoan, I risked exposing my own lack of experience as Minister
I knew that if I failed to win over Nescoan's Minister, then our trip here would only avert Cadador to my movements, losing the advantage of anonymity
I admit I was fearful, but thoughts of my brave crew buoyed my flagging spirits
I employed a new strategy I've adopted for times when doubt threatens to trip me up
I pretend I'm Deren Beq
Because she fears nothing

Sometimes I wonder if there's any situation that would overwhelm her
hale and hearty
HMMM
IT'S STILL TOO QUIET
SO SEPHIE BRINGS THE BUCKET DOWN ON HIS HEAD AND TELLS H M TO WASH THAT MOUTH OUT OR SHE'LL DUNK HIM IN THE OCEAN TO CLEAN IT!
HE TAKES ONE LOOK AT HER HOVERING OUT BEYOND THE EDGE AND ASKS FOR SOAP!
FELLAS, IS IT JUST ME, OR AM I NOT FEELING A LOT OF LOVE FOR THIS PLACE?
NESCOAN'S MORE CIVILIZED THAN THE CAVERNS, COTSON
WHICH IS ANOTHER WAY OF SAYING IT'S DEAD BEFORE ITS TIME
THEN IT'S TIME TO MOVE ALONG AND FIND SOMEPLACE MORE LIKE US
SEPHIE'S GOING TO MEET US HERE, DEREN. WE CAN'T JUST LEAVE
SHE'LL FIND US, OR HEAR ALL ABOUT IT AFTERWARDS
SHE DOESN'T NEED US TO CODDLE HER
SO TELL ME, BIG GUY. WHERE DO THE BAD BOYS GO?

I resisted the urge to burst through the Ministry window, announcing myself with a show of dusty debris
Nescoan thrives on the maintenance of order
Her elegant formality masks a city whose people are hobbled by the need to play their parts perfectly
Papa always said he felt the need to kick dirt on his boots after a visit with Nescoan's Minister
NO NO
IT'S NOT TIME TO PLAY
SKRAWW
SHOO!
I WON'T BE TOO LONG
I giggled behind my smile as I entered
imagining what a good target the stoic Ministry guards made from above

MAY I OFFER MY GREETINGS TO THE MINISTRY AND HER STAFF?
ACCEPTED AND REFLECTED, MINISTER SEPHIE
MINISTER YDITHE HAS BEEN INFORMED OF YOUR ARRIVAL
COME THIS WAY
YOUR MINISTRY IS BEAUTIFUL
THIS IS NESCOAN MADAME MINISTER
SO IT IS
THE MINISTER AWAITS
THE MINISTER OF MERIDIAN REGRETS THE INTERRUPTION OF BUSINESS, MADAME MINISTER
THE MINISTER OF NESCOAN ACCEPTS AND PARDONS
THANK YOU FOR SEEING ME, MINISTER YDITHE
SHALL I EXPLAIN MY PURPOSE HERE?

DO SIT PLEASE
OH, MY SO GROWN UP!
MINISTER NOW, AND I REMEMBER VISITING MERIDAN AND AMUSING MYSELF WITH TEROS AND IDERIA'S LITTLE TODDLER
I AM YOUNG, BUT YOU'LL FIND I'M MINISTER ENOUGH TO MAKE MY FATHER PROUD
OH!
A sudden chill
as though a cloud had masked the sun's warmth
Then a sensation, like
remembered music
Why did the room suddenly remind me of Uncle Iiahn?
I'VE HEARD WORD OF YOUR INTRIGUING EXPLOITS AND I IMAGINE YOU'VE COME TO NESCOAN THINKING TO OFFER US AN ALTERNATIVE TO TRADE WITH CADADOR
I SUSPECT THAT THE SOURCES OF YOUR SUSPICIONS MIGHT HAVE A BIAS TOWARD CADADOR THAT WOULD HAVE COLORED THEIR REPORTS OF MY RECENT ACTIONS.
WOULD YOU CARE FOR MY VERSION OF EVENTS?
SEPHIE, LOOK ABOUT YOU
IS NESCOAN SUFFERING?
NO
EACH SUBJECT HAS SUFFICIENT WEALTH TO ENSURE A PLEASURABLE PEACE
CAN YOU OFFER US MORE?


CADADOR'S STREAMLINED TRADE RUNS HAVE REMOVED THE *TROUBLE* OF TRADE AND ALLOWED US TO FOCUS OUR MINDS ON THE ELEGANT CONTEMPLATION OF OUR ART AND CULTURE
A RETURN TO THE TROUBLESOME DAYS BEFORE CADADORIAN EFFICIENCY WOULD DO NOTHING TO IMPROVE OUR SITUATION
Something troubled me about Minister Ydithe's recitation
Her practiced voice slipped into a sing-song cadence
She'd rehearsed this speech
Her words had the sound of someone else's
AFTER ALL TURBULENCE IN TRADE LEADS TO INSURRECTION AMONG THE PEOPLE
AFTER ALL, THE TURBULENCE IN TRADE THE MINISTER OF MERIDIAN'S ILL-CONCEIVED MISSION WOULD CAUSE
WOULD SURELY LEAD TO *INSURRECTION* AMONG YOUR NOW PEACEFUL POPULACE
An echo of something discussed long ago, I assumed
because the Ilahn I glimpsed was so much younger, and had two good eyes
I saw the evidence, but missed its meaning
WELL, THEN
MINISTER YDITHE, MAY I EXPRESS MY REGRETS FOR WASTING YOUR TIME. I WON'T TROUBLE YOU ANY FURTHER
MY SHIP WILL DEPART ON THE MORNING WINDS

I a
ambled

and
fa.ed

I couldn't escape the poisoned Ministry quickly enough

and I couldn't return to Meridian until I'd achieved the impossible

KREEEEAK

WHO'S THERE?

ME, JAD

YOU'RE GOING AFTER SEPHIE AND I'M GOING WITH YOU.

FEABIE, I CAN'T TAKE YOU. I'M NOT SUPPOSED TO BE GOING MYSE.F!

WHY? BECAUSE I'M NOT ADVENTUROUS?

NO, FEABS -IT'S NOT -

I'M HEADING TO CADADOR THEIR SPIES WILL HAVE NEWS OF SEPHIE'S PATH

YOU KNOW WHAT THE CADADORIANS ARE LIKE I WOULDN'T WANT YOU TO BE IN DANGER

HMPFH!

I'M NOT *WEAK*, JAD!

DO YOU NEED ME TO *PROVE* IT?

FEABIE--!

KSSSSHHS
HHSSHKKKTT
FHWUMP
SEE?
I'M UP FOR WHATEVER COMES
I WON'T SLOW YOU DOWN JAD
UNLESS YOU TRY TO LEAVE WITHOUT ME
FINE
YOU WIN
LET'S GO
I KNEW YOU'D SEE IT MY WAY!
DON'T REALLY HAVE A CHOICE, DO I?
OH, JAD

"YOU COULD CHOOSE TO STAY HOME"
NESCOAN MUST BE A STRANGE PLACE TO LIVE
EVEN ITS SLUMS ARE SPOTLESS!
THIS IS A SLUM?
TIME TO MOVE TO NESCOAN THIS IS THE LIFE!
LIFE?
THERE'S NO LIFE HERE
BACK HOME, PEOPLE WOULDN'T BE CLOSED INSIDE THEIR HOUSES, STRANGERS TO EACH OTHER
NAH WE'D BE MEETING ON THE STREETS, FACE TO FIST
HA HA
HA HA
LAUGH NOW, YOU CAVERNS SCUM
YOU'LL BE BACK HOME ROTTING IN YOUR CAVES BEFORE YOU KNOW IT!
"LAHN'S SURELY GOTTEN MY MESSAGE BY NOW"
BECHTLE'S ROOST
BECHTLE'S ROOST

WHERE'S MY TABLE, GENTLEMEN?
YOU DID SAVE ONE?
I'VE GOT BIG STORIES TO TELL YOU ABOUT A LITTLE GIRL!
WHO'S THAT?
WHAT'S THAT?

THAT MY FRIENDS, IS A FORCE OF NATURE DISGUISED AS A WOMAN
TRY NOT TO BE SWEPT AWAY BY THE WIND THAT'S CAUGHT YOUR HEADS

WE DON'T WANT TROUBLE HERE
DO WE LOOK LIKE TROUBLE?
IF NOT, WE'D BETTER TAKE A RASP TO OUR EDGES AND ROUGHEN THEM SOME MORE

"...WOULDN'T WANT TO GIVE YOU THE IMPRESSION THAT WE'RE NOT!"
GIVE ME A PINT HOUSED IN A PITCHER OF FRIENDS
CRENNER YOU WANT A CUP?
NO, THANKS, HONDELL, I'LL JUST DROWN IN IT
BUT FIRST, I TOLD HER, YOU'VE GOT TO GET THEIR ATTENTION
SEPHIE HERSELF DID THE REST
SO YOU'VE SEEN HER FLY?
ALREADY I'VE SEEN MORE AMAZING THINGS INCLUDING MORE SKY--THAN I HAVE IN MY ENTIRE LIFE!
UH, HUH
SO YOU WITH HIM?
YOU'D BETTER NOT MISS THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET SEPHIE WHILE SHE'S HERE
YOU'LL BE TELLING YOUR CHILDREN HOW LUCKY YOU WERE!
LUCKY, INDEED
YOU'RE NOT DRINKING ALONE?
NOT NOW
YOU'RE HERE!

SAFE
I'M SAFE
GET OVER IT, CRENNER YOU'LL WIN HER OVER
YOU MAKE THAT SOUND EASY
DEREN, I BET YOU NEVER HAVE ANY TROUBLE WITH LOVE
NEVER
I NEVER GET ATTACHED
OH
THAT SEAT IS TAKEN, SIR -AS ARE THESE LADIES!
YOU TELL HIM GRUDER
HOLD ON CAN'T A MAN FINISH A SENTENCE HERE?
OH NO!
SORRY RHYNE!
SURFACE TRASH
YOU TELL HIM

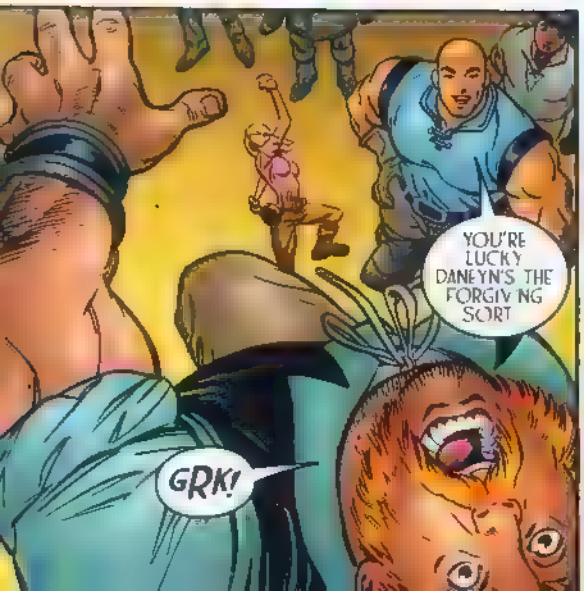
YOUR KIND ALWAYS
HEY!
OUR KIND ALWAYS HAS OUR CREW'S BACK
MESS WITH RHYNE, YOU MESS WITH ME
I BET YOU'RE NOT READY FOR THAT, BIG GUY
A LITTLE THING LIKE YOU?
NOT HARDLY
I'LL MAKE YOU A WAGER THOUGH
YOUR BEST VERSUS US PAIR AGAINST PAIR
YOU LOSE, YOU LEAVE
I'M GAME, BUT TO MAKE IT A FAIR FIGHT, DEREN'S GOT TO SIT IT OUT
WHICH LEAVES ME NEEDING A SECOND TO MATCH YOURS
DANEYN?

OH, HO! I SEE THE SKILL OF *ESTIMATION* IS UNKNOWN IN YOUR CITY!
YOU'VE BEEN INSULTED, AUNT
SHE'S OFFERED TO FIGHT I WON'T BACK AWAY

DOES YOUR FATHER KNOW YOU'RE UP THIS LATE, LITTLE LADY?
DON'T WORRY YOU'LL BE *SLEEPING* WHEN WE SHIP YOU HOME

ME I WOULDN'T HAVE SPOKEN THAT WAY TO A LOGGER
EVEN A SHY ONE LIKE 'NEEN
WE'RE A TOUGH BUT TENDER BUNCH WE TAKE IT TO HEART
HAHAHAHAHAHA
HAHA

=WHN=
-THEN RETURN IT BY HAND

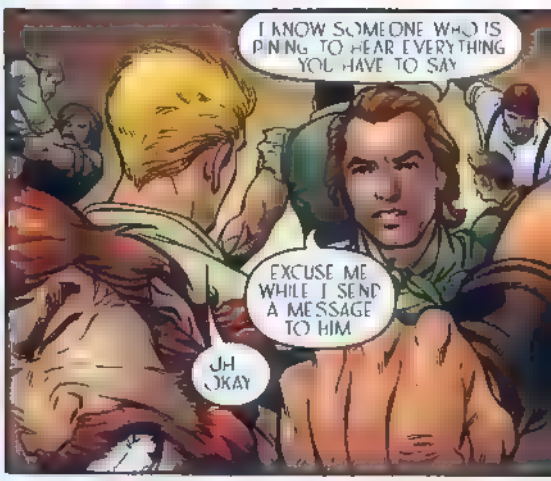

YOU'RE LUCKY DANEYN'S THE FORGIV NG SORT
GRK!

DEREN WOULD HAVE SEPARATED YOU FROM YOUR TEETH AND STILL LEFT YOU SMILING
NEXT~?

DON'T BE SHY

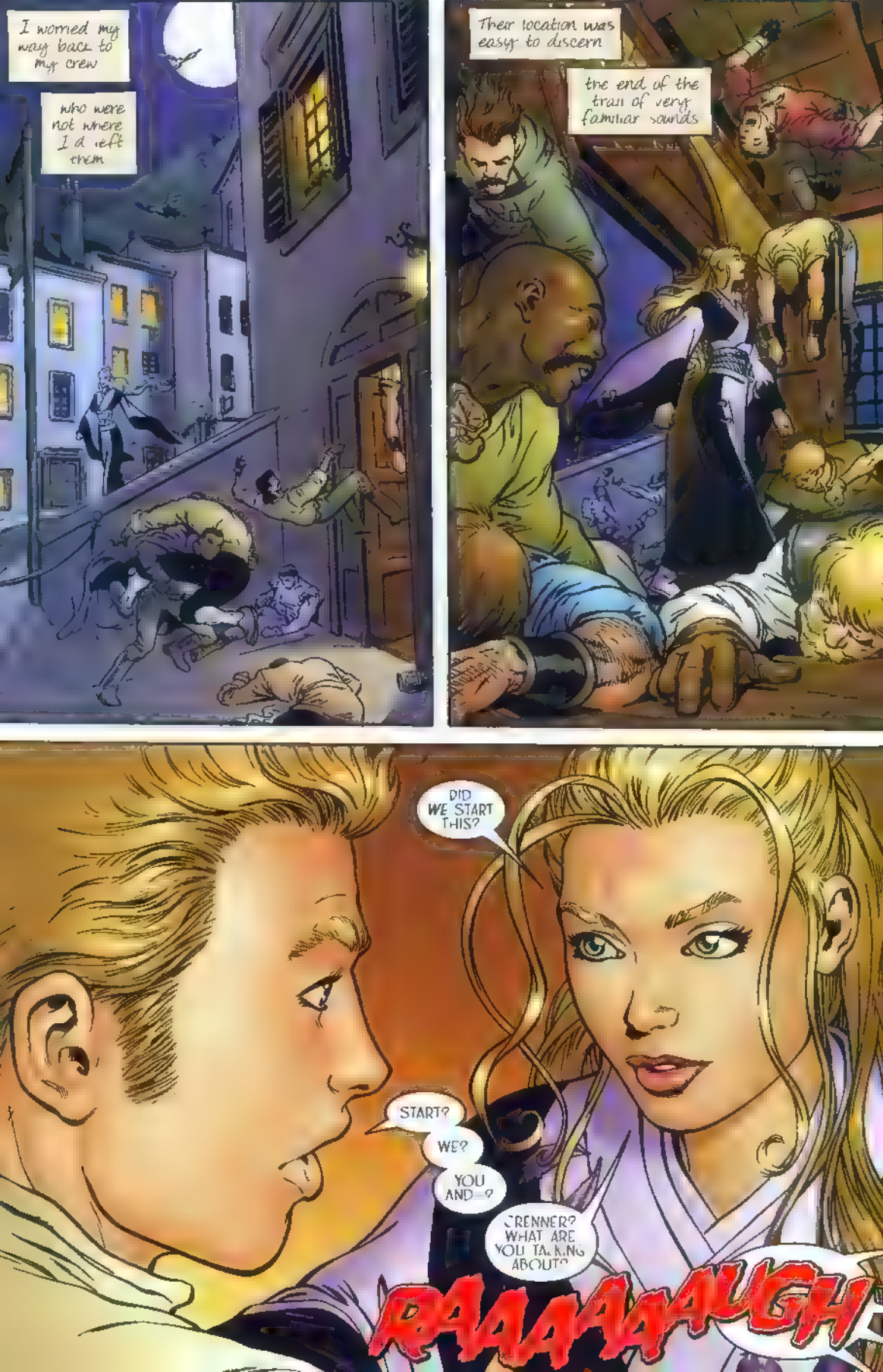
~I'M NOT

DO YOU THINK I'M WRONG TO PURSUE HER MISTER ?
FLENDRED
NO, GO ON YOUR OBSERVATIONS ABOUT SEPHIE ARE VERY INTERESTING


I KNOW SOMEONE WHO IS PINING TO HEAR EVERYTHING YOU HAVE TO SAY
EXCUSE ME WHILE I SEND A MESSAGE TO HIM
UH OKAY

YOU CALL THIS HOSPITALITY?

C'MON, CREW LET'S MAKE OURSELVES AT HOME!
WARNED YOU
UNNG
HNNH
URRRRK
GYAAAH
STOP WORRYING AND COME PLAY, CRENNER!
SHE STILL LOVES JAD
HOW CAN I COMPETE WITH A DEAD MAN?
BE MORE ALIVE


I worried my way back to my crew
who were not where I'd left them
Their location was easy to discern
the end of the train of very familiar sounds
DID WE START THIS?
START?
WE?
YOU AND—?
CRENNER? WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
RAAAAAAUGH

I'd been trying to be Deren Beq
she'd been succeeding
Deren is the most unusual woman I have ever met
She loves her power over men without ever loving one
To my knowledge, that is
I don't know what her life was like before she left the Caverns, but now
OH THAT
I GUESS WE DID

She holds herself apart
NICE TECHNIQUE
even as she bosses us all around
THANKS!
Everyone knows her
No one knows her well
I--
SO--
WHO TAUGHT YOU HOW TO FIGHT LIKE THAT?
RENNI!
Which has led us each to wonder
what would it take to frighten her?

STORYTELLERS

Barbara **KESEL**
WRITER

Luke **ROSS**
Guest **PENCILER**

James **HODGKINS**
Guest **INKER**

Richard & Tonya **HORIE** with Caesar **RODRIGUEZ**
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38 AUG

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Barbara Kesel
Luke Ross
John Dell
Dean White

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Far away on the world of Demetria,

explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

One of these islands is Meridian, home of shipbuilders and Sephie. Sephie has become the Minister of Meridian after her father Turos' death. Her uncle Ilahn is the Minister of the rich city-state of Cadador, which controls most of the shipping and trade on Demetria.

A mysterious force has endowed both Sephie and Ilahn with power – opposing forces – Ilahn's destruction versus Sephie's renewal.

Ilahn wants to control Sephie – and Meridian – but Sephie has been fighting to resist Ilahn's control of herself and Demetria's commerce. The conflict between them erupts into a battle, during which Ilahn disappears...apparently dead at Sephie's hands. Sephie takes control of Cadador, but the Ministry is taken from her by Reesha Teramu. The sunship's mission continues peacefully, with Sephie unaware that Ilahn has secretly resurfaced in Cadador but is content to leave Reesha operating as Minister in order to covertly pursue his vendetta against Sephie.

Sephie has been unsuccessful in recruiting Minister Ydithe of Nescoan to her cause, largely because Ilahn had recently convinced Ydithe of its futility. While Sephie acts as diplomat, her crew is acting up, causing a near-riot that involves everyone except Crenner. Mooning over Sephie's unintended insult, Crenner notices little about the brawl until Sephie arrives, just in time to see Deren Beq's reaction to an unnamed fighter...

Away across the skies, Jad Takarty, Sephie's first love whom she believes died in battle, secretly prepares to leave Meridian. He is discovered by Feabie, who imagines herself Sephie's rival for Jad. Feabie won't let him leave without her.

Meridian™ Vol. 1, Issue 38 AUGUST 2003. FIRST PRINTING. Published by CrossGen Comics, LLC Office of publication: 4023 Tampa Road, Suite 2400 Oldsmar Florida 34677 **CrossGen®, CrossGen Comics® CrossGeneration®,** and the **CrossGen sigil®** are registered trademarks of CrossGen Intellectual Property LLC **Meridian™** and all prominent characters and images are Trademark and Copyright 2003 CrossGen Intellectual Property, LLC ALL RIGHTS RESERVED The stories incidents and characters in this publication are fictional Any similarities to persons living or dead are purely coincidental With the exception of artwork used for review purposes none of the contents of this book may be reproduced in any form without the express written consent of CrossGen Comics LLC PRINTED IN CANADA

Maybe Deren's hard nature comes naturally, but I'm convinced her bravado hides some long-ago pain
Someone must have hurt her very badly
YOU--!

YOU LIED! ALL OF YOU!
DEREN!
THERE'S MY GIRL!
DERRYBERRY, WE'VE BEEN SEARCHING THE ENTIRE CAVERNS FOR YOU!
FOUND ME
LUCKY ME - I'VE GOT TWO LOVELY LADIES, AND ONE MORE ON THE WAY!
DEREN, THAT'S WHY I HAD TO FIND YOU
TUROS AND I MUST LEAVE THE CAVERNS IT'S TIME FOR US TO RETURN TO MERIDIAN UNTIL MY BABY GIRL IS BORN
CAN I GO, TOO?
I WANT TO SEE HER
I WISH THAT COULD BE, DEREN, BUT I CAN'T STEAL YOU AWAY FROM YOUR GRANDMOTHER
OH

WHEEEE!
NO FROWNS!
BECAUSE SOMEDAY DERIA AND I WILL COME BACK TO TEACH YOU TO FLY THROUGH THE AIR IN A SHIP!
AND I'VE BROUGHT A GIFT FOR YOU TO REMEMBER US BY
IT'S YOUR VERY OWN JOURNEYBOOK, DEREN, AND EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KEEP PRACTICING YOUR ART
PRETTY
THERE WE ARE, ALWAYS AT YOUR SIDE
YOU'RE NEVER COMING BACK, ARE YOU?

NOT SOON
BUT I WON'T SAY NEVER
THIS ONE IS ME
THIS PICTURE SHOWS A SPIRITED LITTLE GIRL I LOVE VERY MUCH
SHE'S CURIOUS AND CLEVER, AND SHE HAS GOOD, SHARP EYES
WHICH I HOPE SHE USES TO SEE THE BEAUTY IN EVERY MOMENT OF LIFE!
THEN EVERYTHING SHE SEES, AND EVERYTHING SHE DOES-
GOES IN HERE
MY BOOK

As recorded by Deren Beq herself
The Chronicles of Deren Beq, Fearless Adventurer
BUT I CAN'T DRAW LIKE YOU
NOT YET
GIVEN TIME AND PRACTICE MAYBE YOU WILL
BUT, GOOD OR BAD, NO ONE ELSE HAS YOUR EYES, DEREN
SHARE WHAT YOU SEE
THAT WAY, NO MATTER WHAT COMES.
OR GOES I'M AFRAID IT'S TIME
1
OH, TUROS--
IF ONLY
WE'VE DONE WHAT WE COULD, IDERIA.
NOW WE MUST LEAVE ADVENTURING TO THE NEXT GENERATION
GOODBYE, DEREN
YOUR WEAPON, YOUNG LADY
MY WEAPON

DON'T TOUCH THAT
A HEY, HAS ART APPRECIATION BECOME A CRIME?
THAT'S YOU, ISN'T IT?
WHO'S THE ARTIST?
NOBODY YOU KNOW
THIS WING IS PRIVATE, IF YOU DON'T MIND
I DO MIND
SOMETHING SO LOVELY SHOULDN'T STAY HIDDEN
WILL YOU LOOK AT THAT
WHO'S THE NEW KID?
NAME'S RENNI TESHEN
COMES FROM THE FAR SIDE
SAY'S HE'S MAKING HIS WAY UP IN THE WORLD, BUT HE'S ONLY GOTTEN AS FAR UP AS THE CAVERNS...
OH--?

LOOKS LIKE HE'S MAKING GOOD PROGRESS TO ME!
DON'T YOU EVEN MISS THE SKY?
MISS IT?
IT'S RIGHT OUTSIDE AND ALWAYS WILL BE
THAT IS DEREN BEQ, RIGHT? I HAVEN'T SUDDENLY GONE MAD?
NOPE
THAT'S HER-
AN SHE'S LOOKIN PRETTY HAPPY
WHERE?
PUT IT ANYWHERE THERE'S ROOM
HOW'D YOU END UP WITH THIS PLACE?
WON IT
IN A FIGHT I ASSUME?
DROPPED THE BOUNCER WITH ONE KICK THE OWNER LOVED IT
WHAT'S THIS?
LOOKS PROMISING
HEY!
IT'S EMPTY?
I NEVER THOUGHT I SAW ANYTHING IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO INCLUDE

MAYBE THAT'S CHANGED
GIVE ME AN HOUR OR SO AND I'LL *SHOW* YOU

HAH!
RECOGNIZE IT?

IT'S A *PERFECT* LIKENESS!

YOUR TURN ADD SOMETHING
CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? THAT WILD BEAST *TAMED?*
YEAH, RENNI'S BEEN
NOT HIM *HER*

"SOMEBODY'S *FINALLY* CAPTURED DEREN BEQ!"

RENNI--
ONE OF THE SKY ISLANDS?
WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

THAT'S WHERE I'M GOING TO LIVE SOMEDAY
CADADOR
THE FINEST OF THE ISLANDS, OR MY FANTASY OF IT I'LL BE ABLE TO DRAW IT FROM LIFE SOON
CADADOR !

PEOPLE UP THERE THINK THEY'RE BETTER THAN US
I'D RATHER RULE *HERE* THAN BE AN ANONYMOUS SOUL IN AN OVERSIZED CITY

DEREN--?
HOW CAN YOJ *NOT* WANT TO GO UP THERE?

RENNI, *THIS* IS MY *HOME*
I'LL NEVER LEAVE THESE CAVERNS

RENNI?
THEY SAY AT THE INN THAT YOU PACKED UP TO LEAVE, BUT I
NO
NO
I'M SORRY, DEREN. YOU ARE SUCH A WONDERFUL WOMAN, BUT YOU ARE CONTENT TO RULE THE CAVERNS AND I WANT THE SKY.
RENNI
NO!
RENNI!
YOU'RE NEVER COMING BACK, ARE YOU?

GNNNH!
GO AHEAD-- LEAVE!
EVERYBODY LEAVES ME!
YOU
THEM--
EVERYBODY!
GYANNNNH!
NNNNH
HNNH
HNNH
HUH?
RENN

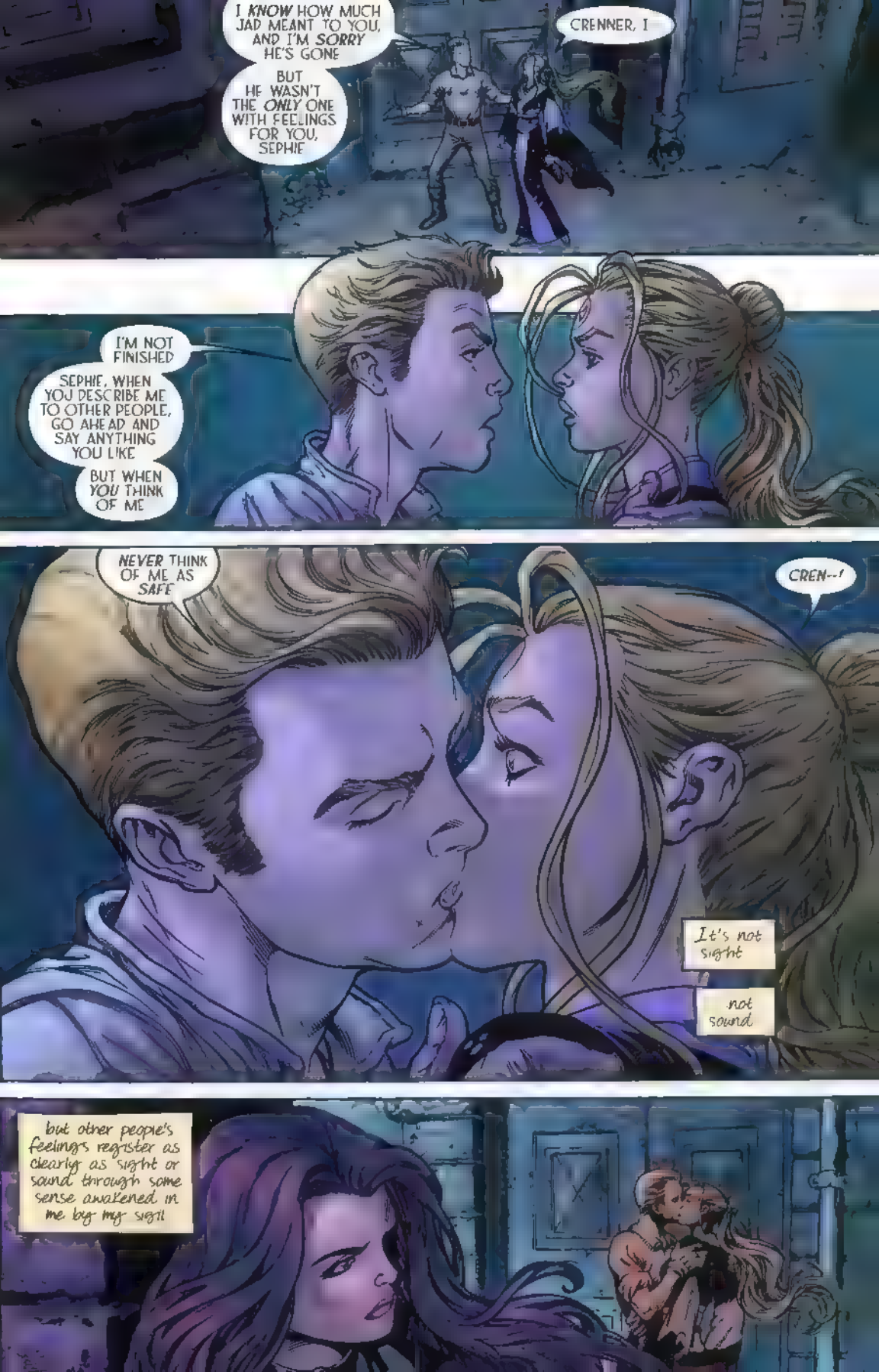
RENN!
KRNNCH
GO AWAY
KRKKL
KHOOSHT
SNAPPT
KRSSSH
THEY NEVER CAME BACK
YOU WON'T EITHER

DEREN! YOU OPEN FOR BUSINESS YET?
PLEASE SAY YES. WE'VE JUST TROMPED THROUGH DAYS OF EMPTY FOREST AND WE'RE *SUFFERING*
GENTLEMEN, THE LAIR IS *ALWAYS* OPEN FOR BUSINESS
IT'S COTSON, HONDELL, AND PANEYN, RIGHT?
IS LOGGING DOWN FOR THE DAY OR THE SEASON?
JUST A REST
LOOKS LIKE YOU HAD A QUIET DISCUSSION GROUP HERE LAST NIGHT
WE MISSED THE PARTY?
JUST HAD TO GET RID OF A LITTLE TROUBLE
IT'S OVER NOW

OVER!

WHUDD
GOOD TO SEE YOU TOO DEREN
IT'S QUITE A SURPRISE TO SEE YOU UP HERE ON NESCOAN-
I NEVER THOUGHT YOU'D LEAVE THE SAFETY OF YOUR CAVE
NEITHER DID I, BUT THEN SHE WANDERED INTO TOWN
..AND I SIGNED ON TO CREW
SHE?
THAT'S SEPHIE OF MERIDIAN!
YOU'RE PART OF HER CREW?
DEREN··
YOU HAVE LUCKED INTO THE GREATEST OPPORTUNITY EVER!
YOU GET TO SEE ALL THE EXCITEMENT IN PERSON
TAKE ME WITH YOU!
THEN WE COULD BE TOGETHER IN THE SKY, JUST LIKE I ALWAYS DREAMED
NO

THAT WAS *YOUR* DREAM.
I MAY HAVE WANDERED INTO THE SKY
BUT I LEFT MY *HEART* DOWN IN MY CAVE
GOODBYE, RENNI--
AT LEAST I GET TO SAY IT *THIS* TIME
SEPHIE
I WAS THINKING ABOUT SOMETHING YOU SAID
AND I HAVE ONE SMALL REQUEST


I KNOW HOW MUCH JAD MEANT TO YOU, AND I'M SORRY HE'S GONE
BUT HE WASN'T THE ONLY ONE WITH FEELINGS FOR YOU, SEPHIE
CRENNER, I
I'M NOT FINISHED
SEPHIE, WHEN YOU DESCRIBE ME TO OTHER PEOPLE, GO AHEAD AND SAY ANYTHING YOU LIKE
BUT WHEN YOU THINK OF ME
NEVER THINK OF ME AS SAFE
CREN--!
It's not sight
not sound
but other people's feelings register as clearly as sight or sound through some sense awakened in me by my sight

DEAL?
CRENNER
It wasn't just the kiss
It was the LONGING behind it
I'd never felt anything that overwhelming
I gasped for breath with lungs already full of air
and tried to reach the surface of my fluttering thoughts before I drowned in sensation
My hands longed to reach for Crenner
My heart still ached for Jad

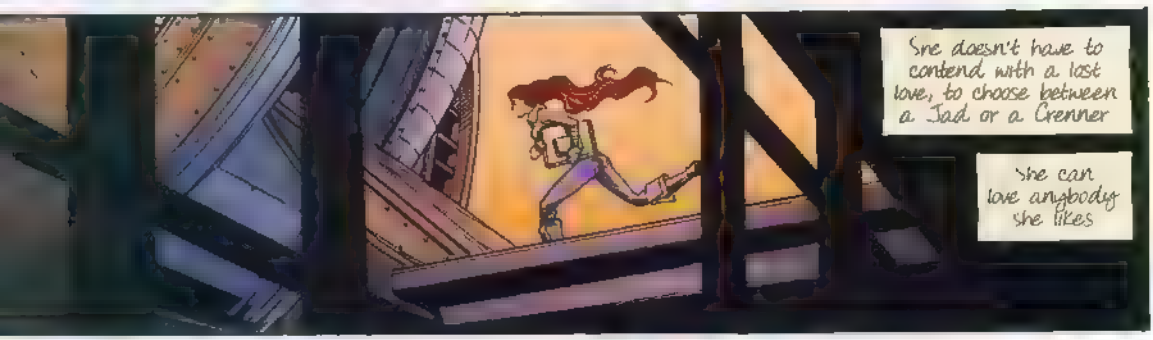
But Jad was dead
While I shied away from even the smallest betrayal of his memory
a small thought whispered its way forward--
I have no heir
Meridian is unprotected

To be privy to another person's inner emotions was intoxicating; and a little embarrassing
but still thrilling
To feel FEEL how he felt!
To know what he meant by SAFE
To wonder what NOT him?
Grenner IS her to the Ministry of Arheim
Even Cadador's VERY particular counselors would find him a suitable mate
And he IS so handsome
It would be so simple to lose myself in the current of emotion sparking between us
even if he wasn't Jad

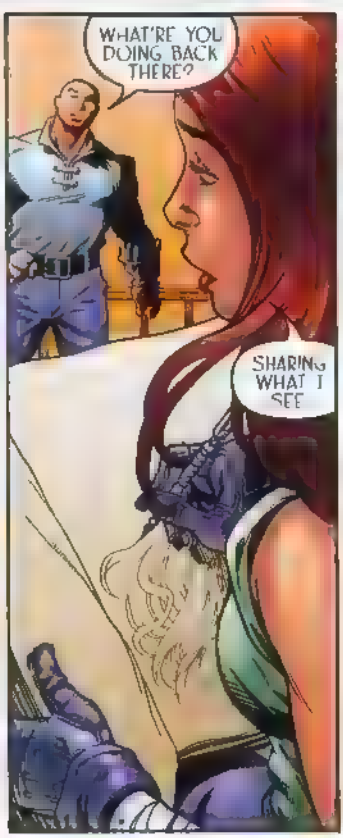
CADADOR'S COMING UP SOON
ONCE WE HIT THE DOCKS, IT'LL BE EASY TO FIND OUT WHERE SEPHIE WENT--
I'VE GOT CONTACTS
AND THEN-
I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE HER AGAIN!
YES
SEPHIE
I CAN'T WAIT
WHAT'S WITH THAT VOICE, FEABIE?
DID YOU TWO HAVE SOME KIND OF FIGHT BEFORE SHE LEFT?
NO.
I'M JUST MAD AT HER FOR LEAVING US, JAD.
AS THE MINISTER'S DAUGHTER, SHE WAS ALWAYS THE SPECIAL ONE, AND THEN SHE GETS THIS WONDERFUL GIFT THAT COULD HELP MERIDIAN, BUT SHE LEAVES
SHE GETS EVERYTHING, BUT SHE ALWAYS WANTS MORE
JAD HOW CAN YOU LIKE HER SO MUCH?
SHE DIDN'T EVEN BOTHER TO RESCUE YOU!
FEABS, SHE THOUGHT I WAS DEAD ALREADY
HAS ANYBODY EVER SURVIVED A FALL FROM MERIDIAN?
WELL BESIDES SEPHIE AND ME
SHE WAS BUSY SAVING EVERYONE ELSE BY KILLING ILAHN, AND NOW SHE'S SAVING OUR WORLD
WAIT 'TIL SHE SEES I'M ALIVE

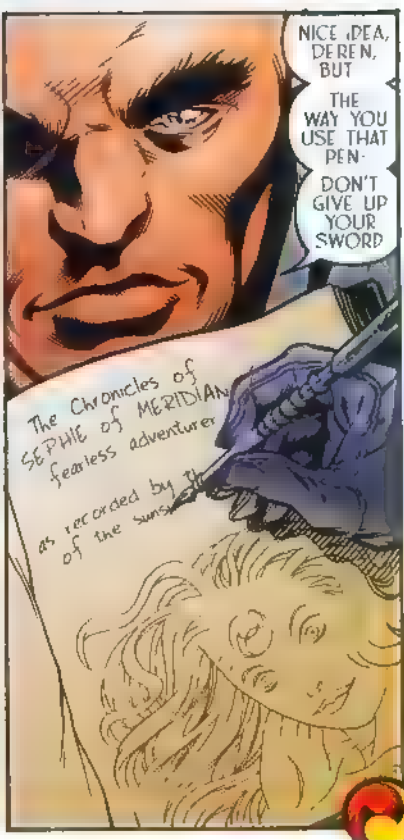
EVERYBODY AWAKE?
EVERYBODY ABOARD?
HRRRNGH
DEREN HAD AN ERRAND--
WE'VE GOT TO WAIT FOR HER

"WHERE D SHE GO?"
TO REPLACE SOMETHING SHE LOST SHE SAID"
Lucky Deren


She doesn't have to contend with a lost love, to choose between a Jad or a Crenner
She can love anybody she likes

NESCOAN MAY NOT HAVE WELCOMED OUR GOALS BUT THAT'S MERELY A SMALL SETBACK, NOT A CAUSE TO CHANGE COURSE
WE'RE OFF TO THE WINDS AGAIN, THIS TIME TO CHASE WHAT MAY BE A MYSTERY, BUT I BELIEVE IT'S A POSSIBLE SOLUTION
ON TO SHERISTAN!


WHAT'RE YOU DOING BACK THERE?
SHARING WHAT I SEE


NICE IDEA, DEREN, BUT
THE WAY YOU USE THAT PEN-
DON'T GIVE UP YOUR SWORD
The Chronicles of SEPHIE of MERIDIAN
fearless adventurer
as recorded by
of the suns

STORYTELLERS

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John **DELL**
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Vincenzo Cucca
Don Hillsman II
Sumi Pak

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On the island of Nescoan, where Sephie has met unsuccessfully with the local Minister, her crew indulges in a wild night on the town. One of the brawlers, Renni Teshen, has a history with Deren Beq, which prompts her memories of being left behind: first as a child by Turos and Ideria, Sephie's parents; then by Renni. When he asks to join them, it's Deren's turn to abandon him. Meanwhile, Crenner surprises Sephie with a kiss, which isn't as surprising as her empathic reaction to it. She suddenly sees Crenner in a new way. Two steps behind them, Jad is still racing to find Sephie, but she is leading the sunship away toward the mysterious city of Sheristan.

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In the inner eye of my mind, I'd seen Jad FALL
felt the mental tether between us break
but there were times when I imagined he was still alive
No matter what I KNEW had happened
JAD--
GET AWAY FROM US!

IT'S SIMPLY REPREHENSIBLE, BOSCAU!
BEING FORCED TO LEAVE CAPADOR!
ALL MY LONG YEARS OF PATIENT SERVICE TO THE MINISTER'S ESTATE AND NOW THAT WRETCHED WOMAN BOOTS ME OUT OF MY ONLY HOME
IF ONLY ILAHN HAD LIVED
AH YES
STRENGTH, LOROSI
WHAT'S DONE IS DONE
THIS VALISE CONTAINS YOUR LETTER OF CREDIT AND LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION
GOODBYE OLD FRIEND
BOSCAU!
DON'T LEAVE SO QUICKLY SURELY YOU CAN STAY UNTIL MY DEPARTURE?
IT'S ALL OVER THE DOCKS!
WE KNOW SHE WENT TO NESCOAN AND MET WITH THE OLD MAID MINISTER THERE BUT NOBODY KNOWS WHERE SHE'S GONE NEXT
AVY IT ANYBODY AN FINE SEPHIL WITHOUT A MAP IT'S ME
EH?

YOU *KNOW* THERE'S A CONNECTION BETWEEN SEPHIE AND ME

SUIT YOURSELF JADLING, BUT I'D WAIT FOR A SIGHTING BEFORE DASHING AWAY FROM HERE

PATIENCE ISN'T AMONG JAD'S VIRTUES AVY

HE'S [redacted] TO FIND SEPHIE NO MATTER WHAT!

CADADOR'S THE NEXUS FOR NEWS, SO ANY WORD OF HER WILL COME STRAIGHT HERE *FIRST*

BOSCAU!

WHAT *NOW* OROSI?

FORGIVE ME! I'M NEEDLESSLY *DELAYING* YOU FROM YOUR DUTIES!

FAREWELL

CARRY ON

BEST WISHES TO MINISTER REESHA

I'M NOT WAITING AROUND AVY

SOMEBODY HERE KNOWS *SOMETHING* OF WHERE SHE'S GONE

WHILE YOU KEEP AN EAR TO THE DOCKS, FEABIE AND I WILL COMB THE STREETS

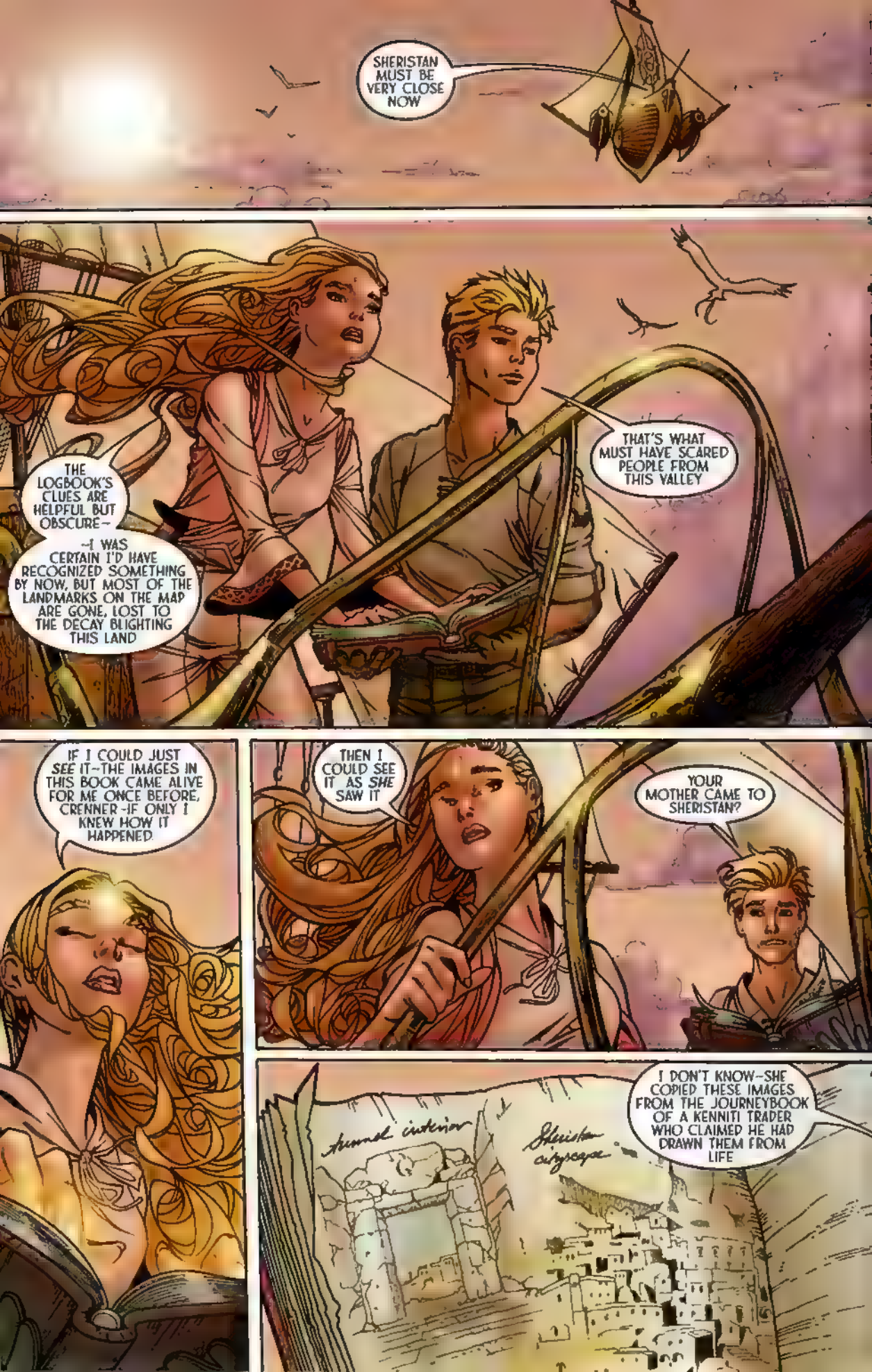
THAT'S DANGEROUS, JAD, ESPECIALLY NOW!

WE'RE READY

JAD AND I MAKE A *GREAT* TEAM

COURIER!
COURIER!
UP HERE BOY!
YES MASTER TORCOS?
TAKE THIS MESSAGE DIRECTLY TO MINISTER REESHA
INFORM HER THAT THE MINISTER OF MERIDIAN'S BOYFRIEND HAS COME TO CAPADOR
I BELIEVE SHE REMEMBERS HIM
THAT OUGHT TO MAKE THE NASTY COW THINK HAPPIER THOUGHTS OF ME

SO
JAD TAKARTY IS HERE ON CADADOR
TELL ME HOW DID HE LOOK?
DID YOU SEE ANY SIGN OF POWER?
POWER, MINISTER REESHA?
LIKE THIS
GYAAH!
NO, MINISTER REESHA
THANK YOU, CHILD
YOU'RE DISMISSED
WITH LAHN OFF TRAVELING
IF JAD STILL HAS POWER
I NEED A LITTLE GOOD ASSISTANCE
RHO RHUSTANE, HELP ME!
NO?
AGAIN I GET NO RESPONSE
I'LL HAVE TO KILL THE BOY MYSELF
OR
DO IT AFTER HE LEADS ME TO SEPHIE
AND IN HER PRESENCE

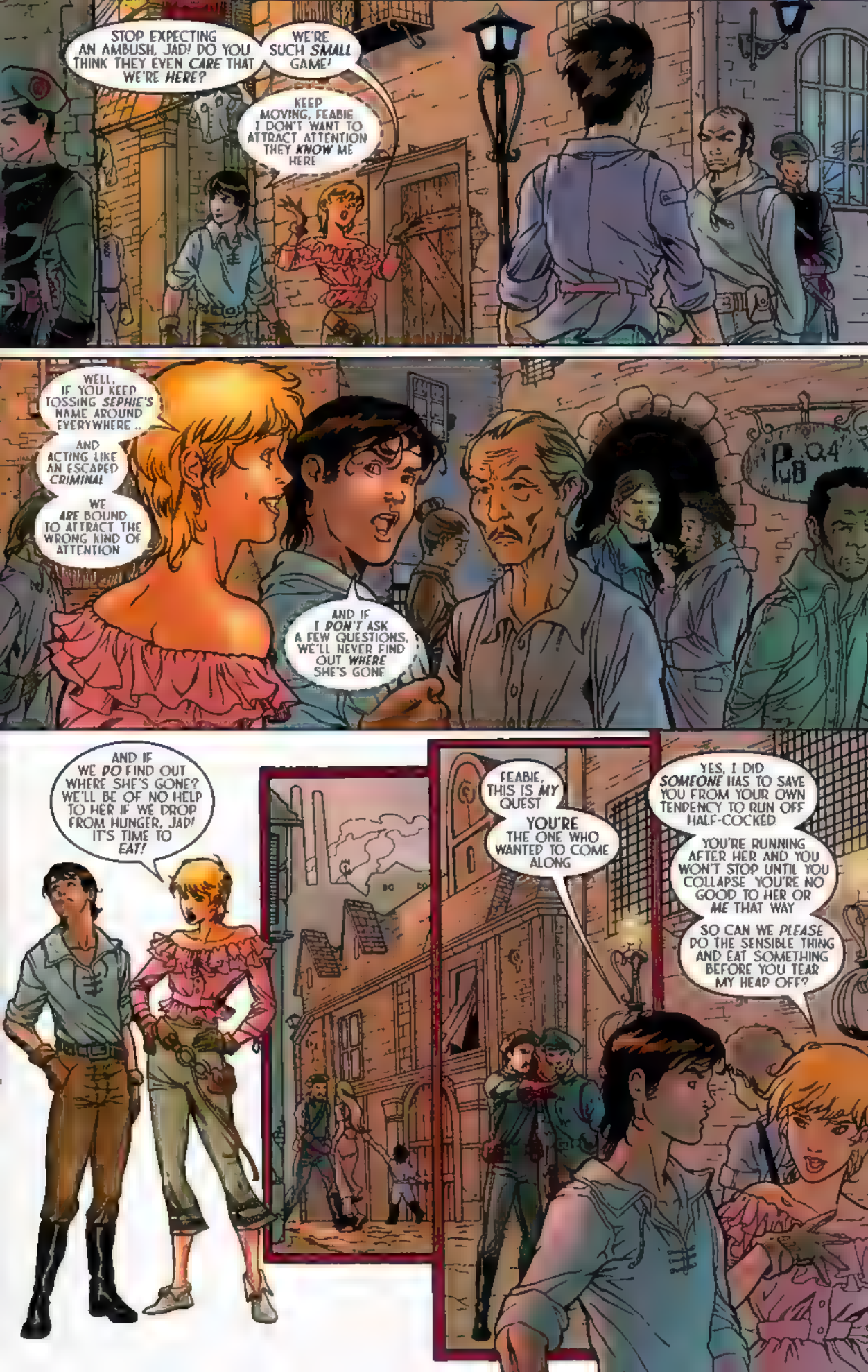

SHERISTAN MUST BE VERY CLOSE NOW
THE LOGBOOK'S CLUES ARE HELPFUL BUT OBSCURE—
—I WAS CERTAIN I'D HAVE RECOGNIZED SOMETHING BY NOW, BUT MOST OF THE LANDMARKS ON THE MAP ARE GONE, LOST TO THE DECAY BLIGHTING THIS LAND
THAT'S WHAT MUST HAVE SCARED PEOPLE FROM THIS VALLEY
IF I COULD JUST SEE IT—THE IMAGES IN THIS BOOK CAME ALIVE FOR ME ONCE BEFORE, CRENNER—IF ONLY I KNEW HOW IT HAPPENED
THEN I COULD SEE IT AS *SHE* SAW IT
YOUR MOTHER CAME TO SHERISTAN?
I DON'T KNOW—SHE COPIED THESE IMAGES FROM THE JOURNEYBOOK OF A KENNITI TRADER WHO CLAIMED HE HAD DRAWN THEM FROM LIFE
tunnel interior
Sheristan cityscape

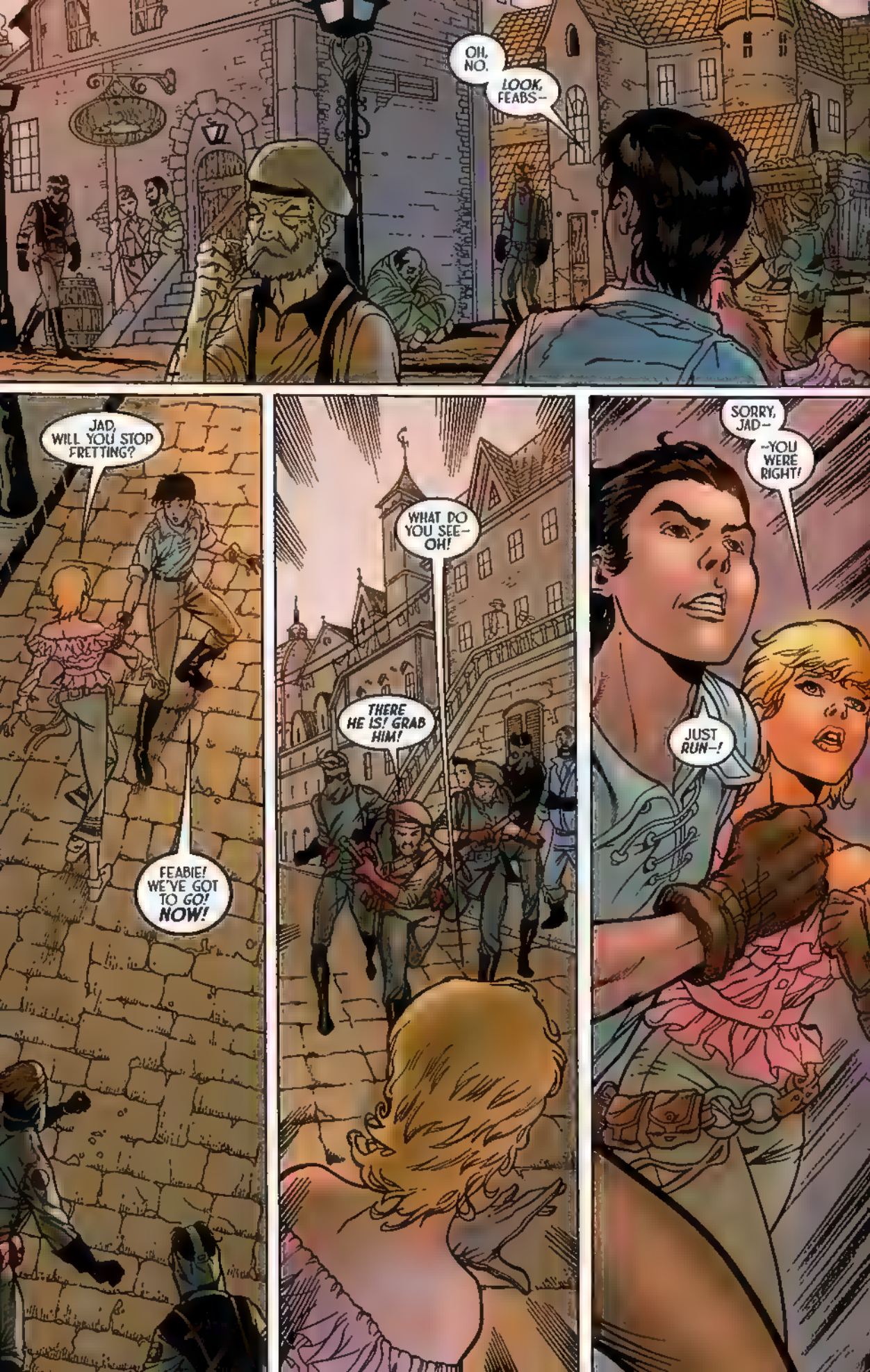
THIS COULD BE THE LOCATION THE BOOK SUGGESTS, BUT THIS CITY IS A DEAD HUSK
IF IT IS, OR WAS, SHERISTAN
..THE CITY WAS SUPPOSEDLY STILL THRIVING IN MY PARENTS' TIME
HOW COULD SO MUCH DECAY HAVE HAPPENED SO QUICKLY OH!

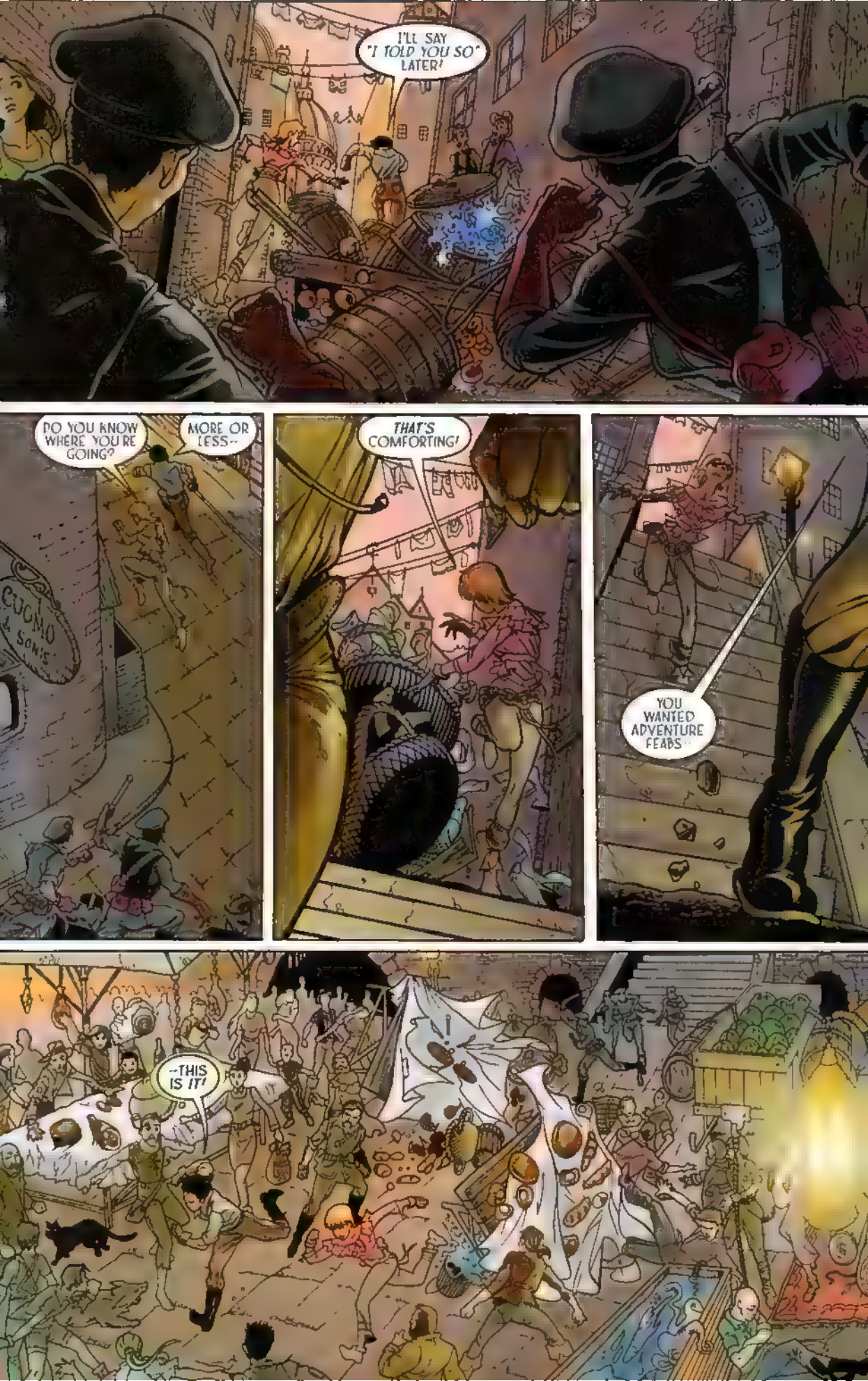
YES!
I SEE IT!
CRENNER, THIS IS THE CITY!
NOW I'M CERTAIN WE'RE NOT CHASING A MIRAGE!
IT'S NOT AN ILLUSION I'M AFTER, BUT I'LL DEFINITELY KEEP CHASING
OH, CRENNER--
YOU'RE SO SINGLE-MINDED! NOT THAT I MIND
SEEMS OUR CRENNER'S MAKING SOME SUCCESFUL DISCOVERIES OF HIS OWN
AYE, COTSON, BUT HE'LL SOON FIND A WOMAN'S MIND IS MORE MYSTERIOUS THAN ANY LOST CITY--!
TEN TIMES MORE DEEP, AND TEN TIMES MORE LIKELY TO WRECK THE SHIP OF HIS SOUL!
SPOKEN LIKE A SINGLE MAN, HONDELL
AND ONE LIKELY TO STAY THAT WAY WITH HIS ATTITUDE, EH, DANEYN?

GENTLEMEN, LET'S TRY IT AGAIN—OVER THRICE, AROUND, AND THROUGH.
DREN, CEREG—IT'S A SIMPLE KNOT.
HOW MANY TIMES DO I NEED TO DEMONSTRATE IT?
WE'RE WATCHING CAREFULLY, RHYNE, BUT OUR TIME BELOW GROUND DIDN'T PREPARE US FOR LIFE ON THE WINDS
IF THIS SHERISTAN PLACE IS REAL, MAYBE WE'LL FIND IT STOCKED FULL OF ABANDONED TREASURES TO COLLECT!
OR OLD BOOKS FROM THE TIME WHEN SHIPS SAILED ONLY ON THE SEA
YOU MEAN THOSE AREN'T JUST STORIES?
DEEKSOHN'S A HISTORY NUT, MIESU HE LOVES ALL THOSE OLD TALES
"BUT, ENNIS—THEN WHY ISN'T HE THE ONE RECORDING OUR STORY?"
"BECAUSE SOMEONE ELSE TOOK ON THAT TASK. WOULD YOU WANT TO BE THE ONE TO TAKE THE JOURNEYBOOK FROM DEREN BEQ?"
JUST THINK—THE LEGENDARY CITY OF SHERISTAN STILL EXISTS AND WE'RE GOING TO EXPLORE IT!
THAT WE ARE—YOU AND ME

Sherastan itself may stand on the brink of ruin, but that day was bright and alive.
...so full of life and joy. So unlike the island of my nemesis...
CADADOR.
SLOW DOWN--!
AND I SAY THAT WHAT WE NEED TO DO IS STOP FOR A MORNING MEAL!
WE CAN'T, FEABIE.


STOP EXPECTING AN AMBUSH, JAD! DO YOU THINK THEY EVEN CARE THAT WE'RE HERE?
WE'RE SUCH SMALL GAME!
KEEP MOVING, FEABIE I DON'T WANT TO ATTRACT ATTENTION THEY KNOW ME HERE
WELL, IF YOU KEEP TOSSING SEPHIE'S NAME AROUND EVERYWHERE ..
AND ACTING LIKE AN ESCAPED CRIMINAL
WE ARE BOUND TO ATTRACT THE WRONG KIND OF ATTENTION
AND IF I DON'T ASK A FEW QUESTIONS, WE'LL NEVER FIND OUT WHERE SHE'S GONE
PUB
AND IF WE DO FIND OUT WHERE SHE'S GONE? WE'LL BE OF NO HELP TO HER IF WE DROP FROM HUNGER, JAD! IT'S TIME TO EAT!
FEABIE, THIS IS MY QUEST
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO WANTED TO COME ALONG
YES, I DID SOMEONE HAS TO SAVE YOU FROM YOUR OWN TENDENCY TO RUN OFF HALF-COCKED
YOU'RE RUNNING AFTER HER AND YOU WON'T STOP UNTIL YOU COLLAPSE YOU'RE NO GOOD TO HER OR ME THAT WAY
SO CAN WE PLEASE DO THE SENSIBLE THING AND EAT SOMETHING BEFORE YOU TEAR MY HEAD OFF?


OH, NO.
LOOK, FEABS--
JAD, WILL YOU STOP FRETTING?
FEABIE! WE'VE GOT TO GO! NOW!
WHAT DO YOU SEE-- OH!
THERE HE IS! GRAB HIM!
SORRY, JAD--
--YOU WERE RIGHT!
JUST RUN--!


I'LL SAY "I TOLD YOU SO" LATER!
DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING?
MORE OR LESS--
CUOMO & SON'S
THAT'S COMFORTING!
YOU WANTED ADVENTURE FEABS...
--THIS IS IT!

CATCH THEM, MEN!

CADADOR'S ELITE CANNOT LOSE TRACK OF A PAIR OF CHILDREN--!

--OR WE'LL NEVER HEAR THE END OF ?

I JUST DIDN'T EXPECT--

--SO MUCH--

--OF IT!

YOU OKAY, FEABS?

I'M--

=HUFF=

--FINE!

=HUFF=

REALLY!

REALLY?
YOU SEEM A DOZEN ISLANDS AWAY TO ME

What is it that draws us to another person?

Personality?
Character?
Attractiveness?
Or just some unknowable instinct?
What tells us what's right?
How do we ever know for sure?

SEPHIE, IF I WAS OUT OF LINE YESTERDAY, I APOLOGIZE

OH, NO! YOU WEREN'T REALLY

THEN WHY DID YOU RUN AWAY?

I NEEDED TO CATCH MY BREATH.
I WAS A LITTLE SURPRISED.
YOU SEE... I CAN *FEEL* HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT ME.

Take Jad.

I loved him with all of my heart-- he was part of Meridian to me, part of ME

But I still remember the first time I saw Crenner...

..the way he seemed to GLOW

THAT'S AN *INTERESTING* SIDE TO YOUR POWER, SEPHIE.

BUT I CAN'T DO THE SAME, SO YOU'LL HAVE TO *TELL* ME.

LOOKS LIKE YOU MIGHT GET YOUR WISH IF THIS PIRATE THING DOESN'T WORK OUT, YOU MIGHT TAKE UP A CAREER AS A MATCHMAKER

I'M NOT THE ONE TO GIVE ROMANTIC ADVICE

I ALWAYS THOUGHT YOU WERE HANDSOME, BUT--

BUT *JAD*.

I KNOW

TAKE YOUR TIME, SEPHIE

THIS JOURNEY'S JUST BEGINNING

ALMOST THERE!

WATCH YOUR GRIP FEABIE - THESE RAILS ARE FOG SLICK

NOTHING WORSE THAN TAKING MIDDAY SOUP TO THE SAILMAKERS BACK HOME!

I'D PREFER CLIMBING ALL THOSE LADDERS TO THIS BUT YOU'VE GOT A POINT

UNGH! IS THERE MORE *CLIMBING* AHEAD?

THAT'S THE LAST TRAVEL OF ANY KIND YOU'LL DO FOR SOME TIME!

UH. OH BAD LEVEL

WHAT NOW, JAD?

I DON'T KNOW BUT GET BEHIND ME

HOW *NOBLE*

YOU!

YOU?
MOST CITIZENS REFER TO ME AS *MINISTER* OF *CADADOR*
JAD TAKARTY, YOU ARE UNDER ARREST--
--FOR *ESPIONAGE*, ATTEMPTED *ASSASSINATION* OF A MINISTER-TO-BE, AND *TREASON*
WHAT--?
PLEASE DON'T DO ANYTHING FOOLISH. WE WOULDN'T WANT TO RISK ANY LIVES HERE
IT'S NOT *YOU* I'M INTERESTED IN. MY SPIES TELL ME THAT SEPHIE HAS LEFT MERIDIAN. IF YOU TELL ME WHERE I CAN FIND HER, YOU'RE FREE TO GO
I'M NOT TELLING YOU A THING!
THAT'S AN UNCOOPERATIVE ATTITUDE. PERHAPS IF I--
NO! DON'T HURT HIM!
I'LL TELL YOU *EVERYTHING* YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT SEPHIE. JUST LET HIM GO
FEABIE!
WHAT ARE YOU *DOING?*

JAD, YOU KNOW THAT SEPHIE CAN PROTECT HERSELF.
WE CAN'T. WE MUST TELL THIS WOMAN EVERYTHING WE KNOW
THIS IS THE ONLY WAY, JAD
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU BE DOING THIS
VERY WELL, I ACCEPT
YOU DO?
KZZZZZT
. THAT YOU ARE AN INEXPERIENCED PRACTIONER OF DECEPTION
JAD!
NOR DO YOU HAVE ANY POWER LEFT OF YOUR OWN OR YOU'D HAVE USED IT TO DEFEND YOURSELF
OH, JAD--I'M SO SORRY!
UHNNNGH
JAD?
GO DROP, FEANE

I would do anything to bring Jad back to life...
..but I can't live looking backwards toward the Land of Might Have Been.
My path goes forward from here..
...forever away from his.
NOOOOO!
JAD!
NOOOOO!

"KESEL'S TALE OF A YOUNG WOMAN'S COMING OF AGE IS TIMELESS." — *Comics Buyer's Guide*

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40

DEC

MERIDIAN

DEADSHOT

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Barbara Kesel
Vincenzo Cucca
Don Hillsman II
Sumi Pak

Far away on the world of Demetria,

explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

One of these islands is Meridian, home of shipbuilders and Sephie. Sephie has become the Minister of Meridian after her father Turos' death. Her uncle Ilahn is the Minister of the rich city-state of Cadador, which controls most of the shipping and trade on Demetria.

A mysterious force has endowed both Sephie and Ilahn with power – opposing forces – Ilahn's destruction versus Sephie's renewal.

Ilahn wants to control Sephie – and Meridian – but Sephie has been fighting to resist Ilahn's control of herself and Demetria's commerce. The conflict between them erupts into a battle, during which Ilahn disappears...apparently dead at Sephie's hands. Sephie takes control of Cadador, but the Ministry is taken from her by Reesha Teramu. The sunship's mission continues peacefully, with Sephie unaware that Ilahn has secretly resurfaced in Cadador but is content to leave Reesha operating as Minister in order to covertly pursue his vendetta against Sephie.

While Sephie leads the sunship crew on toward the mysterious lost city of Sheristan, a new romance is brewing between her and Crenner of Anheim.

Meanwhile, Sephie's first love, Jad, whom she believes dead, has been captured in Cadador while trying to uncover clues to Sephie's secret destination. Feabie, who accompanied Jad, looks on in horror as he is dragged away by the Cadadorian soldiers under Minister Reesha's command.

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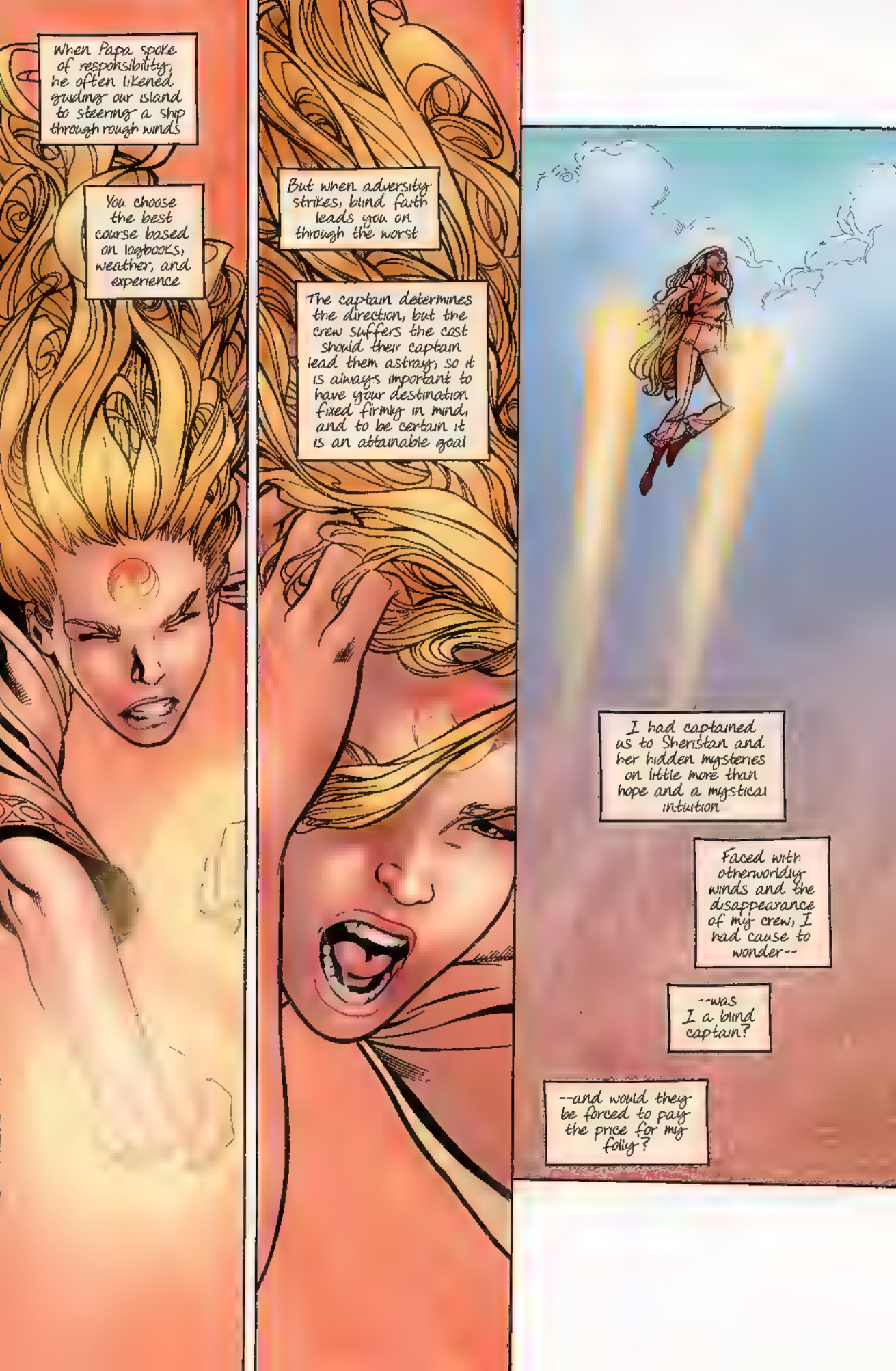
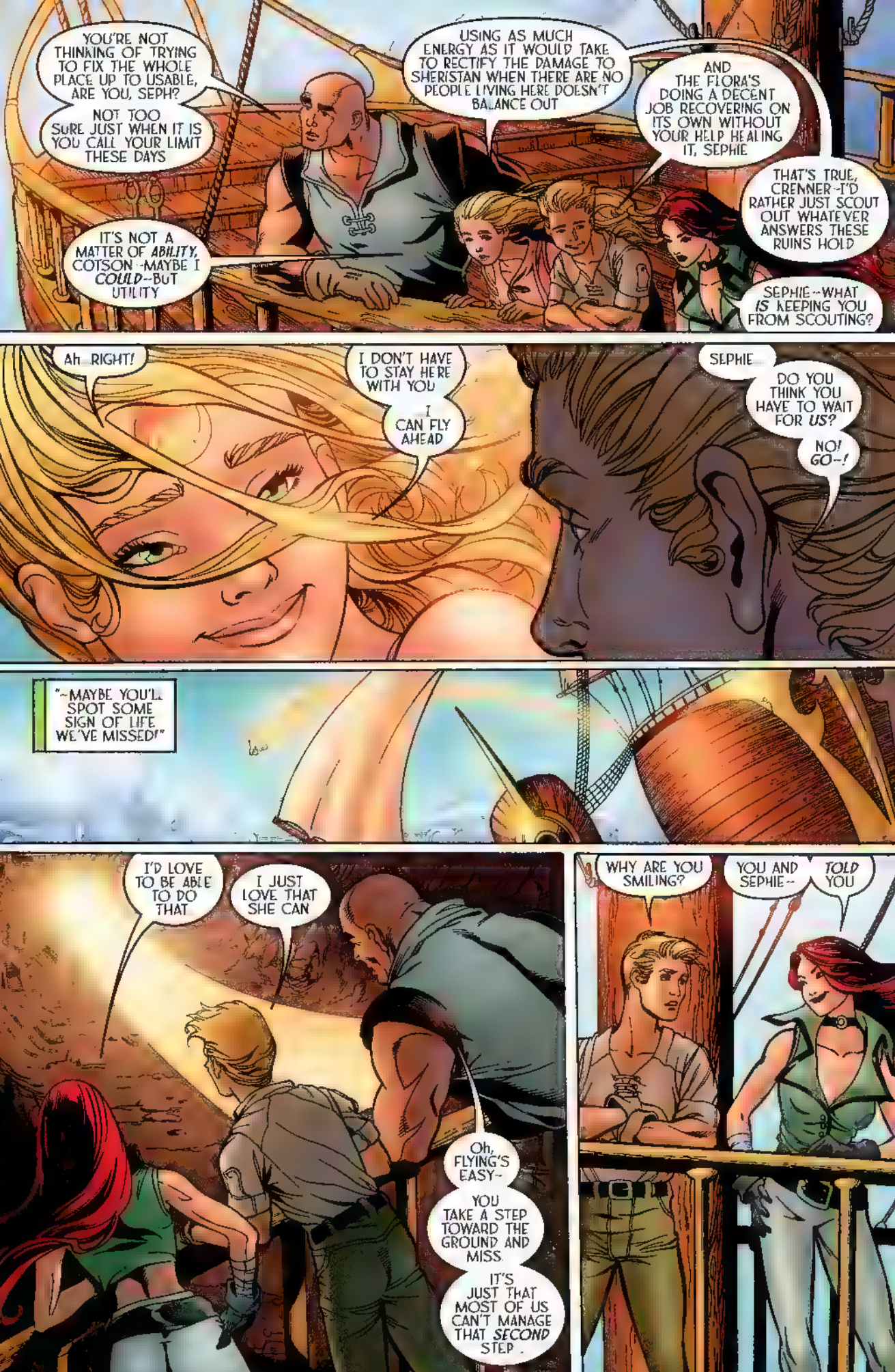

When Papa spoke of responsibility, he often likened guiding our island to steering a ship through rough winds
You choose the best course based on logbooks, weather, and experience
But when adversity strikes, blind faith leads you on through the worst
The captain determines the direction, but the crew suffers the cost should their captain lead them astray; so it is always important to have your destination fixed firmly in mind, and to be certain it is an attainable goal
I had captained us to Sheristan and her hidden mysteries on little more than hope and a mystical intuition
Faced with otherworldly winds and the disappearance of my crew, I had cause to wonder--
--was I a blind captain?
--and would they be forced to pay the price for my folly?

THIS IS THE FABLED LAND OF SHERISTAN?
IT WAS.


YOU'RE NOT THINKING OF TRYING TO FIX THE WHOLE PLACE UP TO USABLE, ARE YOU, SEPH?
NOT TOO SURE JUST WHEN IT IS YOU CALL YOUR LIMIT THESE DAYS
IT'S NOT A MATTER OF *ABILITY*, COTSON--MAYBE I *COULD*--BUT UTILITY
USING AS MUCH ENERGY AS IT WOULD TAKE TO RECTIFY THE DAMAGE TO SHERISTAN WHEN THERE ARE NO PEOPLE LIVING HERE DOESN'T BALANCE OUT
AND THE FLORA'S DOING A DECENT JOB RECOVERING ON ITS OWN WITHOUT YOUR HELP HEALING IT, SEPHIE
THAT'S TRUE, CRENNER--I'D RATHER JUST SCOUT OUT WHATEVER ANSWERS THESE RUINS HOLD
SEPHIE--WHAT *IS* KEEPING YOU FROM SCOUTING?
Ah...RIGHT!
I DON'T HAVE TO STAY HERE WITH YOU
I CAN FLY AHEAD
SEPHIE...
DO YOU THINK YOU HAVE TO WAIT FOR *US*?
NO! *GO*--!
"--MAYBE YOU'LL SPOT SOME SIGN OF LIFE WE'VE MISSED!"
I'D LOVE TO BE ABLE TO DO THAT
I JUST LOVE THAT SHE CAN
Oh, FLYING'S EASY--
YOU TAKE A STEP TOWARD THE GROUND AND MISS
IT'S JUST THAT MOST OF US CAN'T MANAGE THAT *SECOND* STEP.
WHY ARE YOU SMILING?
YOU AND SEPHIE--
TOLD YOU

Sherstan had clearly been unoccupied for some time, but still

there was a presence

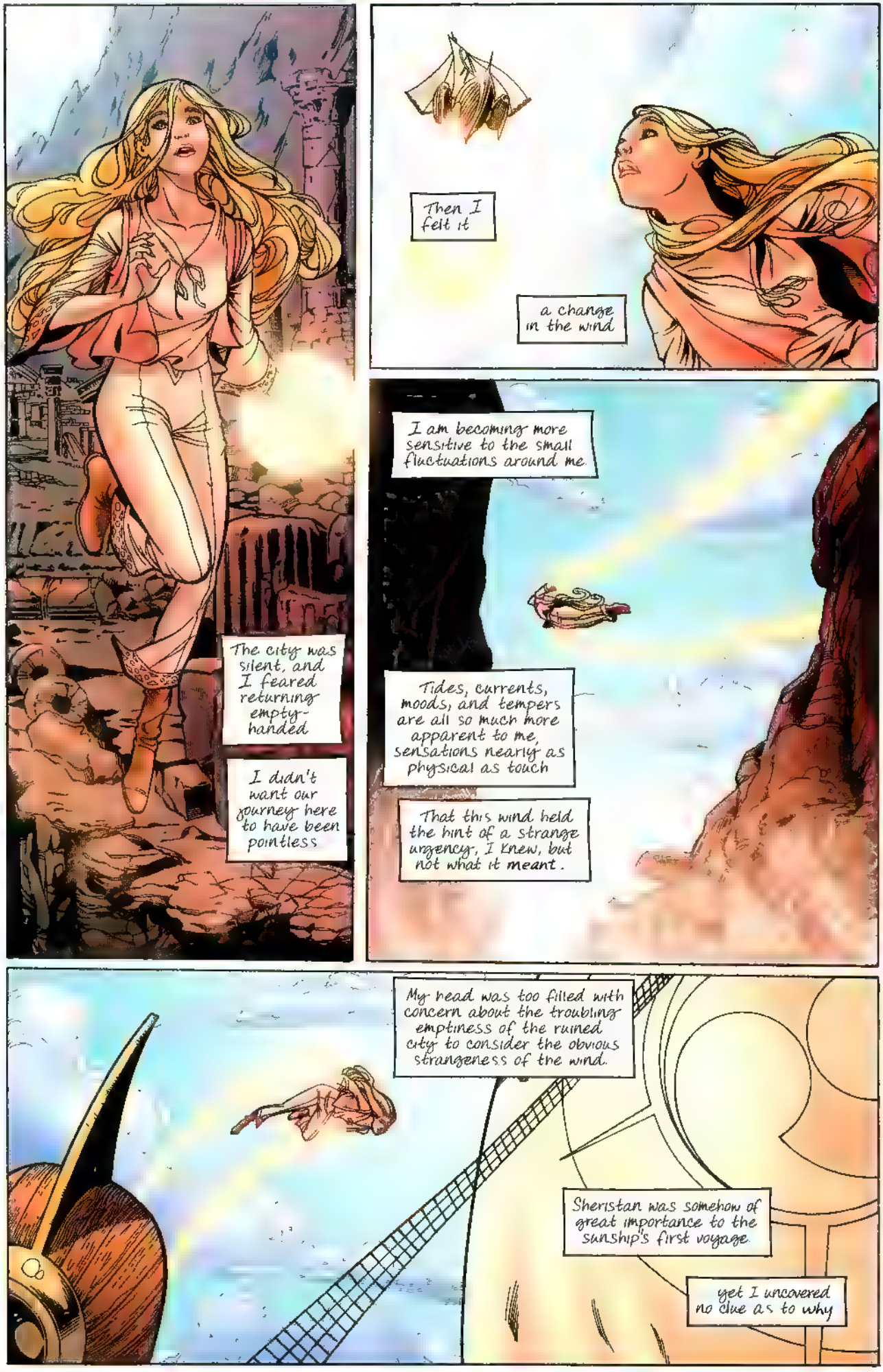
I felt something from the eroding structures I passed over

some echo

This was once a vibrant place

Whatever caused the people to leave has left behind no fear or hostility

just sadness


Then I felt it
a change in the wind
I am becoming more sensitive to the small fluctuations around me
Tides, currents, moods, and tempers are all so much more apparent to me, sensations nearly as physical as touch
That this wind held the hint of a strange urgency, I knew, but not what it meant.
The city was silent, and I feared returning empty-handed
I didn't want our journey here to have been pointless
My head was too filled with concern about the troubling emptiness of the ruined city to consider the obvious strangeness of the wind.
Sheristan was somehow of great importance to the sunship's first voyage
yet I uncovered no clue as to why

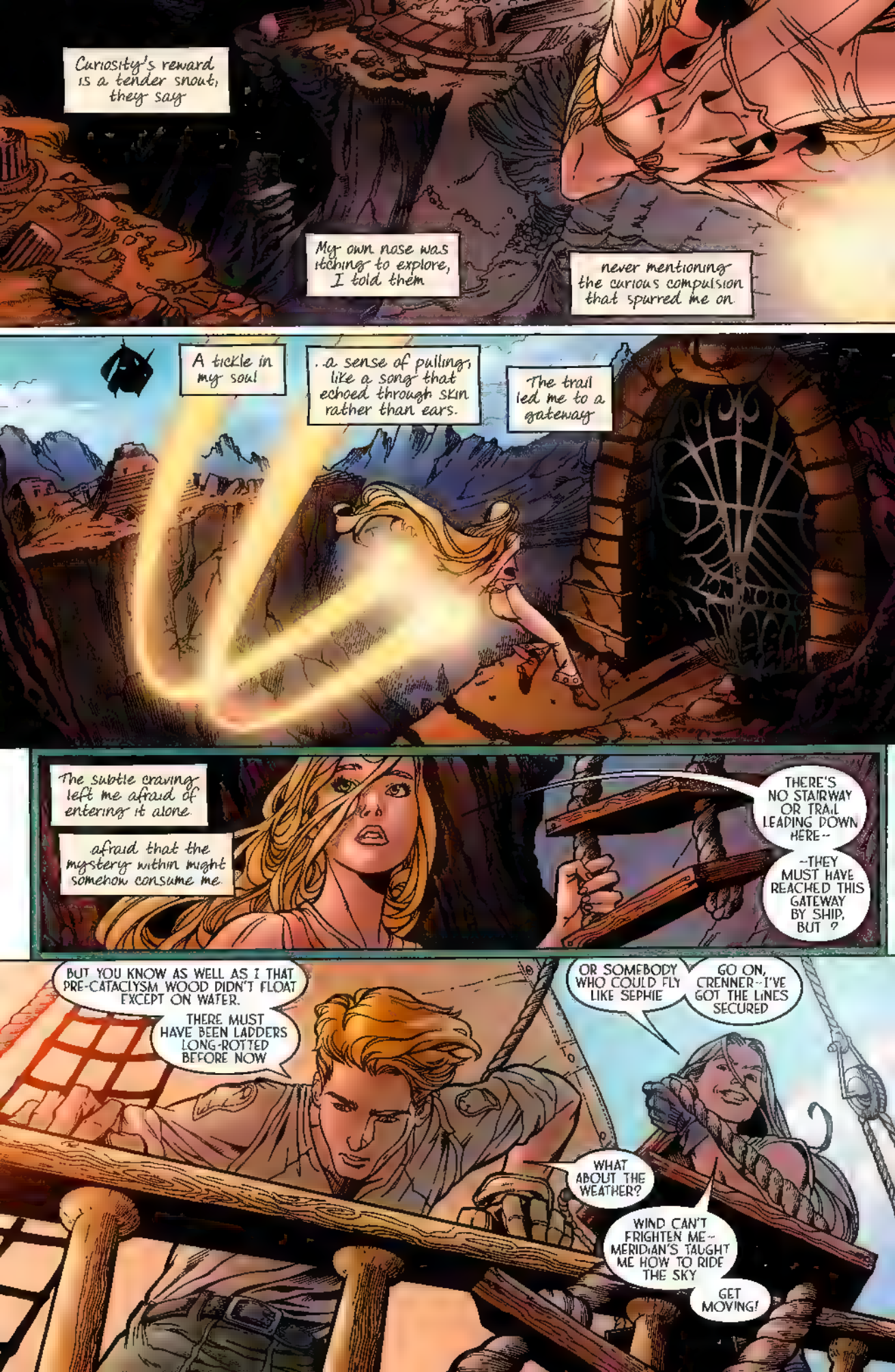
NOTHING
THE COMPLETE ABSENCE OF LIFE TELLS US *SOMETHING*
EITHER THE PLANETARY DECAY HAS AFFECTED THE GROUND HERE, OR THERE'S SOME BIGGER QUESTION INVOLVED -BUT FOR THERE TO BE NO ANIMAL LIFE IN AN AREA THIS LARGE IS UNNATURAL
THAT'S TRUE AND WHILE I'D LOVE TO INVESTIGATE FURTHER
THESE WINDS ARE DISTURBING
NO MORE DISTURBING THAN USUAL
POOR HONDELL. SAILING WILL NEVER AGREE WITH YOU, WILL IT?
THE WINDS JUST DRY ME OUT TOO QUICKLY, THAT'S ALL

SOUTH I KNOW NOTHING MORE THAN *SOUTH*
MY SPY IN NESCOAN WAS ONLY ABLE TO DISCERN A *DIRECTION*, NOT A DESTINATION
IF SHE INDEED SEEKS SHERISTAN, I LACK ENOUGH INFORMATION TO TRACK HER MOVEMENTS

I..AHN, DIDN'T THE MUSE TEACH YOU HOW TO TRAVEL WITHOUT THAT DEVICE?
THE MUSE IS AN INCONSTANT RESOURCE~
~ONE THAT CAN BE TAPPED ONLY RARELY
AND NEVER RELIED UPON
SHE IS NOT THE ONLY ONE
I ATTEMPTED TO MAKE CONTACT WITH RHO RHUSTANE, SEEKING HIS HELP IN THIS MATTER
BUT THERE IS NO ANSWER TO MY CALL
REESHA,YOU ARE THE MINISTER OF CADADOR ISN'T THAT POWER ENOUGH?
I'M ONLY PRETENDING TO BE MINISTER WHILE YOU HIDE YOURSELF AWAY AND PURSUE YOUR PERSECUTION OF SEPHIE, YOU KNOW THAT
AND YOU ALSO KNOW THAT THERE IS NO POLITICAL POWER THAT CAN COMPARE WITH THE SENSATION OF LIGHTNING AND FLIGHT I DON'T WISH TO LOSE THAT

ILAHN, YOU COULD GUARANTEE ITS CONTINUANCE
I TOLD YOU HOW SEPHIE GRANTED POWER TO HER BOYFRIEND
NOW, REESHA--YOU DON'T WANT TO BECOME DEPENDENT ON MY LARGESSE
THIS MAGIC WE WIELD IS TRANSITORY--ONLY THE POWER OF OUR OWN KNOWLEDGE AND ABILITY TO LEAD IS A LASTING STRENGTH
I WOULDN'T MIND BEING A LITTLE DEPENDENT
HMMMM
A NOTION TO BE TABLED UNTIL OCCASION DEMANDS ITS REVIEW
WHAT CONCERNS ME NOW IS SEPHIE'S INTENTIONS
I HAVE NO INTELLIGENCE OF SEPHIE'S POSITION, NO SPY AMONG HER CREW
MY NIECE AFFECTS ME TO THE POINT WHERE I HAVE OVERLOOKED THE MOST BASIC STEPS THERE MUST BE A WAY TO DISCERN HER EXACT LOCATION

YOU COULD ASK THE BOYFRIEND
I HAVE HIM IN CUSTODY
THE BOYFRIEND? THE TAKARTY BOY?
REESHA, WHY DIDN'T YOU OFFER UP THIS TIDBIT SOONER?
NEGOTIATION IS ALL ABOUT TIMING
YOUR OWN WORDS
TAKE ME TO THIS BOY
THEN, PERHAPS, WE CAN DISCUSS A REWARD


Curiosity's reward is a tender snout, they say
My own nose was itching to explore, I told them
never mentioning the curious compulsion that spurred me on
A tickle in my soul
. a sense of pulling, like a song that echoed through skin rather than ears.
The trail led me to a gateway
The subtle craving left me afraid of entering it alone
afraid that the mystery within might somehow consume me
THERE'S NO STAIRWAY OR TRAIL LEADING DOWN HERE--
--THEY MUST HAVE REACHED THIS GATEWAY BY SHIP, BUT ?
BUT YOU KNOW AS WELL AS I THAT PRE-CATACLYSM WOOD DIDN'T FLOAT EXCEPT ON WATER.
THERE MUST HAVE BEEN LADDERS LONG-ROTTED BEFORE NOW
OR SOMEBODY WHO COULD FLY LIKE SEPHIE
GO ON, CRENNER--I'VE GOT THE LINES SECURED
WHAT ABOUT THE WEATHER?
WIND CAN'T FRIGHTEN ME-- MERIDIAN'S TAUGHT ME HOW TO RIDE THE SKY
GET MOVING!

LOOKS LIKE AN OLD LAVA TUNNEL--NO SIGN OF MODERNIZATION.
WE HAVE TUNNELS LIKE THIS BENEATH MERIDIAN
IT'S COMFORTING TO BE BACK UNDERGROUND
YES, DREN--THE SKY'S A LITTLE TOO BIG SOMETIMES
IT'S SIZED TO FIT ME, CEREG NOT YOU CAVERN DWARVES
ME I'M RELIEVED TO HAVE SOLID GROUND UNDERFOOT
EVEN IF WE ARE TRAPPED IN A DARK CAVE THAT'S LIKELY FILLED WITH MONSTERS WHO'LL EAT US FOR LUNCH
OH, COTSON--THEY'LL HAVE TO GET PAST ME TO GET TO YOU!
HUH?
THE ROCK'S CHANGED IT'S--
--IT'S BEEN SMOOTHED, BUT THERE ARE NO TOOL MARKS
IT'S NOT RIGHT?
MAYBE I SHOULD SEND YOU ALL OUTSIDE
UNTIL I'M SURE IT'S SAFE?
SAFE? FOR US?
IT'S NOT THAT DARK
WELL, THEN
OOA
WHAT WAS THAT?

HOT TEA
THAT'S WHAT I NEED--
HOT TEA AND CHILLED HONEY CAKES
IT WAS DOMENEK'S TURN FOR BAKERY GOODS~
YOU MAY BE OUT OF LUCK
WE'LL KNOW ONCE WE'RE INSIDE, CIRO
DON'T DEPRESS ME BEFORE I'M DISAPPOINTED
LEAVE ME MY SAD HOPE
HOPE'S LIKELY TO BE ALL YOU'LL FIND INSIDE~
~I HEARD TELL THAT MINISTER REESHA HERSELF ACCOMPANIED THE SQUAD BRINGING THAT REBEL BOY IN -
~NOT A CHANCE THOSE HOODHEADS LEFT MUCH PROVENDER
EXCUSE ME!
YOU'RE HOLDING A FRIEND OF MINE IN THERE
PERHAPS YOU TWO COULD GET ME INSIDE TO VISIT HIM?
IF YOU COULD, I'D BE SO GRATEFUL
HEAR THAT?
FAMILIAR CHANT, EH?
HER POOR BOYFRIEND
WHAT'S THE UNFORTUNATE'S NAME, DARLIN'?

JAD
JAD TAKARTY OF MERIDIAN
JAD
TAKARTY
OH, THAT'S RICH!
LET'S GET SOME TEA
SORRY MISS
CAN'T HELP YOU WITH THAT ONE
HEAD ON HOME TO MERIDIAN, DARLIN'
YOU'LL NEVER SEE YOUR TRAITOR AGAIN --
--NOT IN MINISTER REESHA'S CITY
SOMEHOW
I THOUGHT
NO, I KNEW THAT WOULD BE YOUR ANSWER

There is no feeling so sickening

as the realization that you may have walked blindly into danger

without any means of escape

And not alone

Everyone was in danger because of my curiosity

OH-- THAT'S JUST *WIND*.

SO YOU'RE SAYING WE'RE SAFE? THERE'S NO CREATURE ATTACHED TO THAT LOVELY NOISE?

I'M SAYING IT'S JUST A NATURAL-

OOOOAAAAHH

KREEEESH

It's so easy to make assumptions

So troublingly quick to let one bit of endence slip by unobserved

to watch in horror as it becomes a disaster magnified by the surprise of its ferocity

To realize too late

you are not
welcome where
you are

There was no time to think

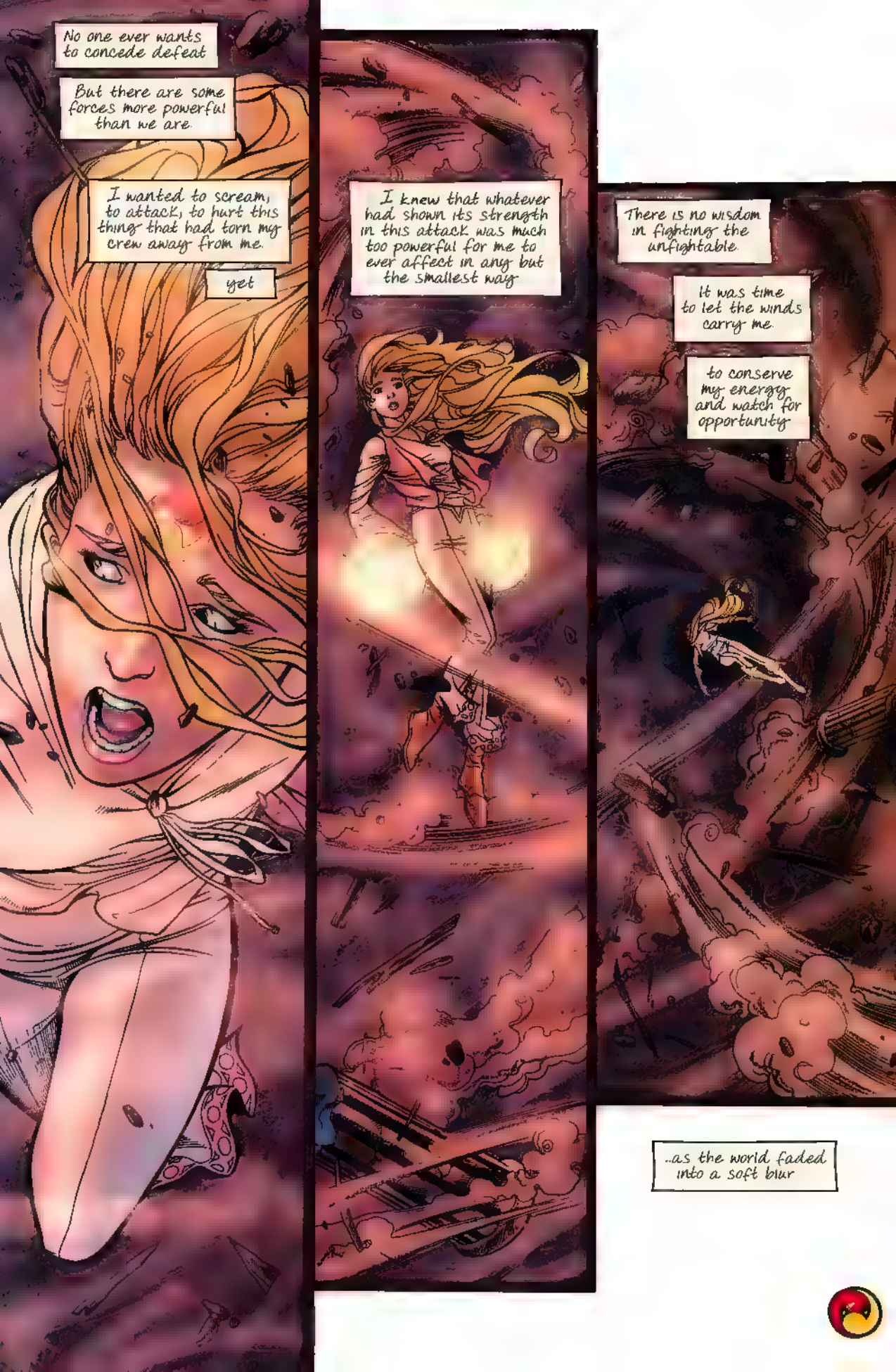
as everything was torn away

lost

The world became a haze of broken images

small horrors

and neverending screams


No one ever wants to concede defeat
But there are some forces more powerful than we are
I wanted to scream, to attack, to hurt this thing that had torn my crew away from me.
yet
I knew that whatever had shown its strength in this attack was much too powerful for me to ever affect in any but the smallest way
There is no wisdom in fighting the unfightable
It was time to let the winds carry me
to conserve my energy and watch for opportunity
..as the world faded into a soft blur

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Sephie's distracted by her blossoming romance with Crenner, not knowing that her first love, Jad, is being held captive at Reesha's command in Cadador's jail. Sephie and her sunship crew have reached the fabled city of Sheristan and found it to be a city of ruins, but, reacting to an empathic call, she leads them through an opening in a cavern wall down a long tunnel, hoping to find whatever beacon is luring her there. What she discovers is disaster, as a wild wind sweeps them from the tunnel, tossing everyone into the sky and destroying the sunship. Sephie can only scream as her ship and her crew are stolen away by the swirling winds...

Meanwhile, Feabie, who accompanied Jad from Cadador, tricks the Cadadorian guards and ends up with the keys to the jailhouse.

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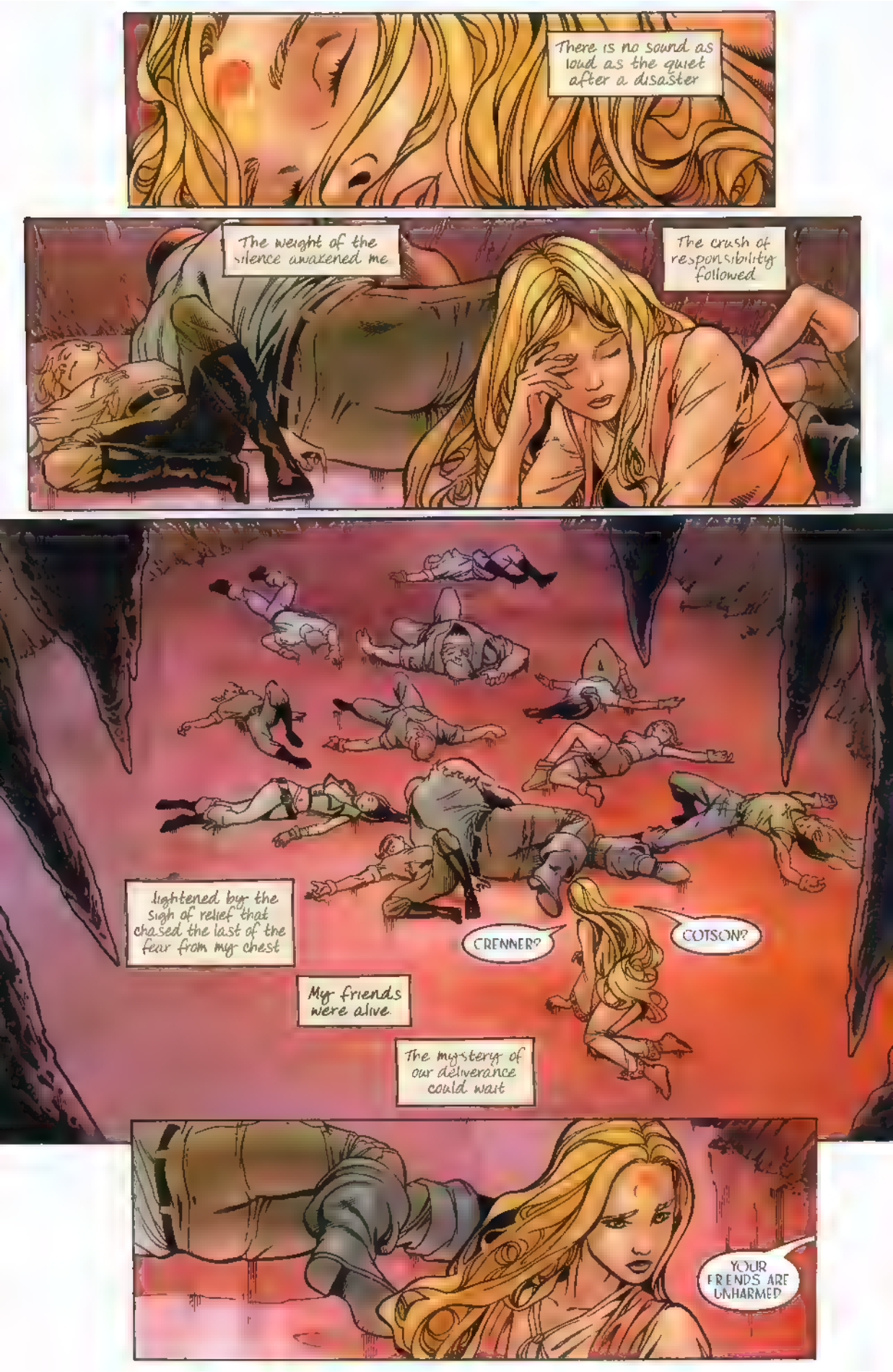
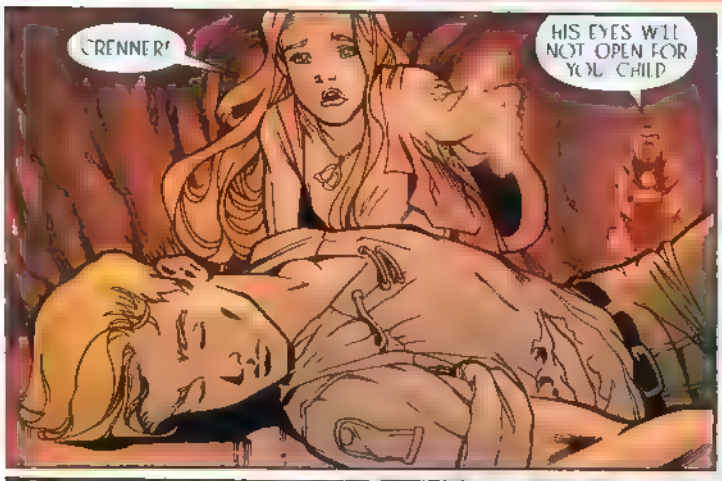
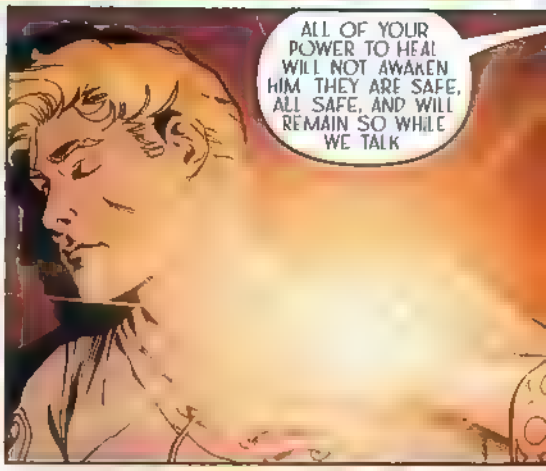
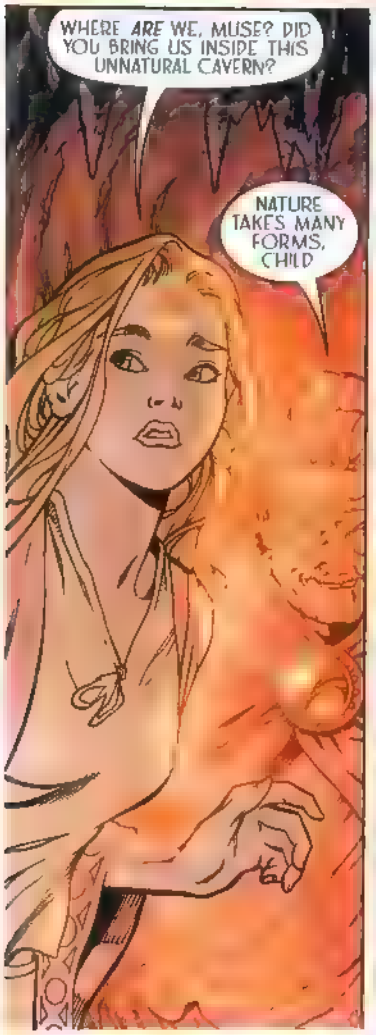

There is no sound as loud as the quiet after a disaster
The weight of the silence awakened me
The crush of responsibility followed
lightened by the sigh of relief that chased the last of the fear from my chest
My friends were alive
The mystery of our deliverance could wait
CRENNER?
COTSON?
YOUR FRENDS ARE UNHARMED

MUSE?
YOUR FRIENDS WILL AWAKEN IN THEIR OWN TIME. SIGIL BEARERS RECOVER MORE QUICKLY. COME AND TALK WITH ME, SEPHIE


CRENNER!
HIS EYES WILL NOT OPEN FOR YOU, CHILD


ALL OF YOUR POWER TO HEAL WILL NOT AWAKEN HIM. THEY ARE SAFE, ALL SAFE, AND WILL REMAIN SO WHILE WE TALK


WHERE *ARE* WE, MUSE? DID YOU BRING US INSIDE THIS UNNATURAL CAVERN?
NATURE TAKES MANY FORMS, CHILD

WHAT YOU CALL UNNATURAL IS SIMPLY A PRODUCT OF MY WILL BEING MORE ORDERLY THAN THE CHAOS THAT FORMED THE CAVE'S PREVIOUS SHAPE
THERE ARE WORLDS WHERE ROCK DOES NOT FLY

AND REALMS WHERE WHAT *YOU* CONSIDER *LAWS* OF NATURE ARE CHALLENGED

MUSE?
WAIT
The summer after I learned to read, Papa's lessons added a new kind of problem
Prickly turns he called them
Stories where a decision had to be made and the listener was to choose between two paths
MUSE?
At first, the choices were easy
Choose to rescue a drowning child?
Simple!
Eventually, they became more difficult--there was no certain route through problems, and sometimes, no right answer
Two men claim one calf as their own. The calf cannot be split--who takes possession?
We would spend hours dissecting the thinking behind my decisions
Every conundrum I struggled through now, he said
would make such thinking come more easily when I became Minister after him
What would he think of this prickly turn?
Would he choose to stay by his friends, knowing they might be subject to dangers if he left?
Or would he choose to chase the mystery, knowing that we'd come to Shenstan because of the connection to the mark on my forehead?
But Papa was gone. The decision was mine to make

but not mine
As soon as I spotted the other sigil above this chamber's door I knew I had no choice
Mystery had already left its mark on me I had to know why!
I followed the Muse, wondering where the strange old woman would lead me
before realizing
that there were more mysteries surrounding the Muse than simply her destination

What compelled me to follow might seem like bravery
but for me, curiousity has always been the stronger lure
The path before me was disorienting and strange --a true prickly turn--but I'd managed Meridian's secret caverns without a map This corridor of possible trails was just another puzzle to unravel
Every sailor on Meridian learns how to sort out knotted lines!
You select one rope and follow its path, gently feeling your way through the tangle with a combination of sight and touch intermixed with a dash of intuition

Using the second light which was quickly becoming second nature I studied this maze feeling for the [illegible] route
Guided by the impulse I traveled to a place beyond the boundaries of my caverns
far beyond
I kept my course, trusting that I would be protected
which is what brought me

here

GREETINGS SIGIL-BEARER
ARE YOU HERE?
I HAVE MANY FORMS
THE MUSE OF GIATAN IS ONE OF MY LESSER ASPECTS
ONE OF ?
I AM DANIK AND YOU WILL SOON BE INSTRUMENTAL TO MY WORK
WHERE ARE WE? ARE WE STILL UNDER THE MOUNTAIN?
MY LIBRARY A REPOSITORY OF ALL KNOWN THOUGHT - S STATIONED HERE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE BLEAK ZONE LIGHT YEARS FROM DEMETRIA
YOUR QUIET WORLD HIDES ITS ENTRANCE AND PROTECTS THE KNOWLEDGE I'VE ACCUMULATED HERE
SO FAR YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE I'VE EVER ALLOWED TO SEE IT
YOU INTEREST ME THE ACCIDENTAL NATURE OF YOUR CHOOSING FLIES IN THE FACE OF MY CAREFUL PLANS, YET YOU CONTRIBUTE HEAVILY TO THE POTENTIAL FOR SUCCESS
ADD TO MY KNOWLEDGE, SEPHIE LET ME KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED IN YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH THE SIGIL

IS THIS A BOOK?
IT COLLECTS AND STORES YOUR INFORMATION. IN THIS CASE, ONLY THOSE RECOLLECTIONS YOU *CHOOSE* TO SHARE WITH IT
WILL IT HURT?
NO MORE THAN THE MEMORIES RECALLED MIGHT
WHAT DO I REMEMBER? I DO KNOW I WASN'T EXPECTING ANYTHING AT ALL
YOU CAN TELL WHEN *SOME* THINGS ARE ABOUT TO HAPPEN -
YOU CAN *FEEL* IT
OTHERS SLIP BY
YOU JUST DON'T REALIZE THINGS ARE ABOUT TO CHANGE
FOREVER

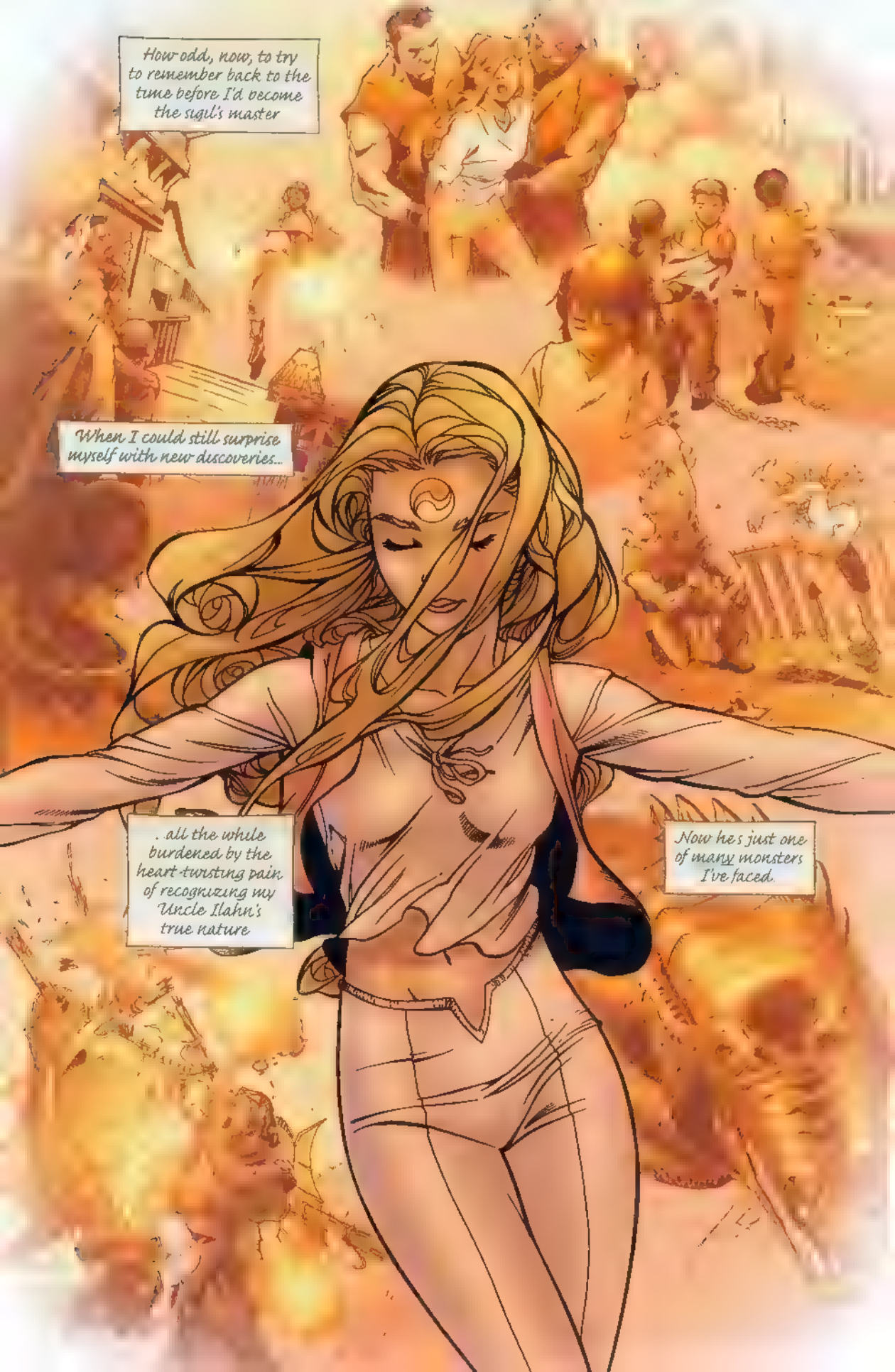
There it was.
My whole life to date.
Laid out in the simple thoughts formed by my youthful perspective.
Told to a stranger..
..would I ever be that trusting again?
If my childhood ended the day Papa died...
...my adulthood began the day I offered up my story and realized with each recollection just how far behind I'd left my child's ways.
I'd traded Meridian for Demetria, and Demetria for the stars...
...perhaps to join the spirits who shine there.

THAT'S THE ONE WHO FELL FROM MERIDAN?
WHERE ARE YOU SOPHIE?
AND LIVED?
THAT'S WHAT THEY SAY. BUT WE JUST HAVE HER WORD. NONE OF US WAS THERE TO WITNESS
UH?
WHY DON'T YOU JUST ASK ME?
HE'S AWAKE
DON'T ANGER HIM NOW

WHY NOT? HE DOESN'T LOOK LIKE SO MUCH
WHAT ABOUT THE POWERS HE'S SUPPOSED TO HAVE?
RUMORED TO HAVE -IF HE HAD 'EM, HE'D HAVE USED 'EM WHEN WE BROUGHT H'M IN
HMMM
YES. I DID HAVE POWERS LIKE SEPHIE'S! SHE GAVE THEM TO ME AS A GIFT, BUT THEY GOT USED UP WHEN THE WOMAN WHO CALLS HERSELF MINISTER OF CAPADOR TRIED TO KILL ME, MY DAD, AND EVERYONE FROM MERIDIAN!
IF I WERE YOU, I'D BE THINKING ABOUT WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN ONCE SEPHIE FINDS OUT WHERE I AM
IS THAT A THREAT?

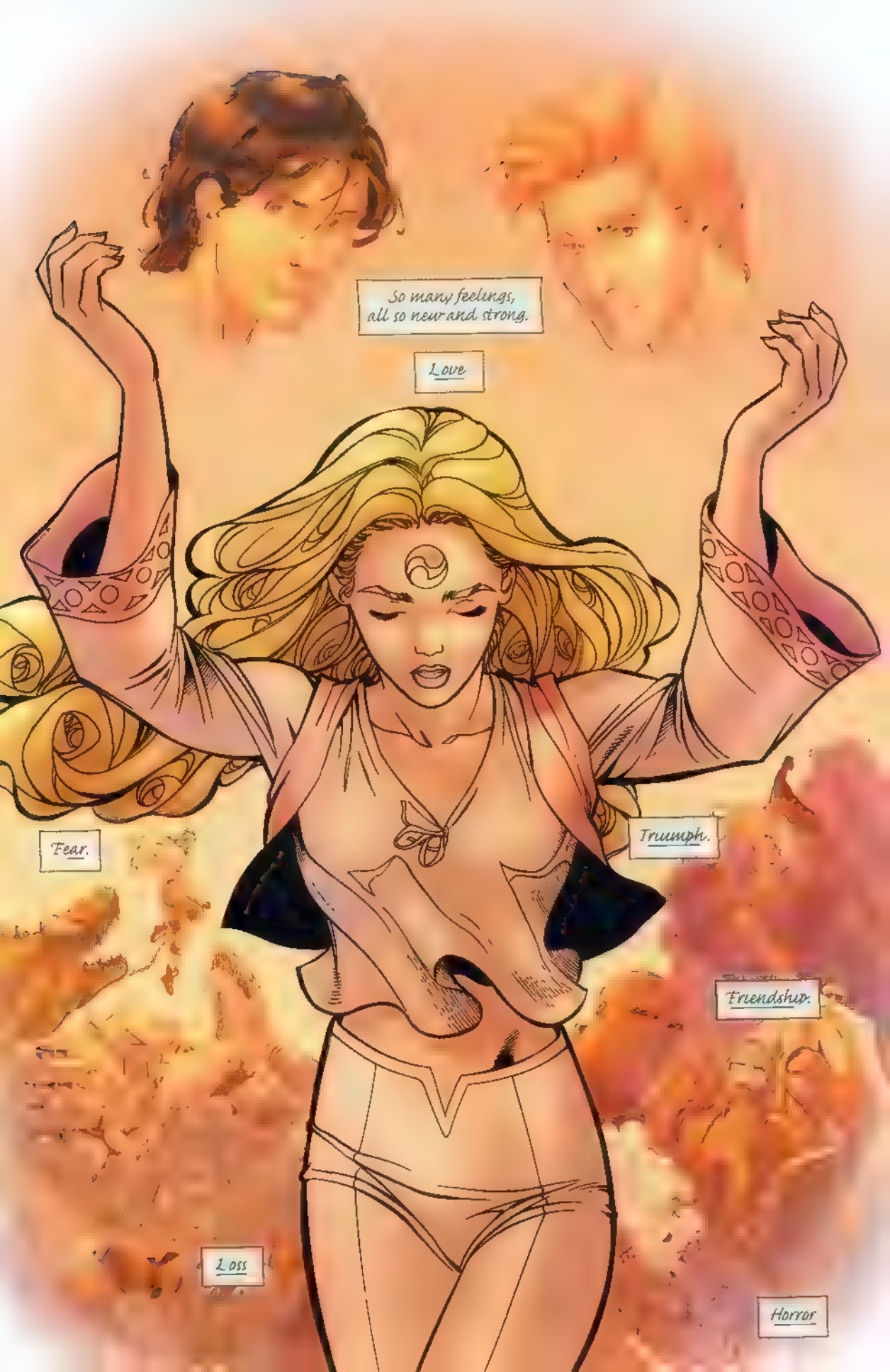
BECAUSE SHE'S NOT HERE NOW
...
krreeeeerk
HEY, HERO OF MERIDIAN
WHERE'S YOUR SMART MOUTH?

WHACK
NOT SO PROUD ANYMORE ARE YOU?
CAPADOR DOESN'T TAKE ANY LIP FROM YOU MERIDIAN FOLK!
OH, JAD
SUN'S FADING JUST A LITTLE LONGER
JUST AFTER THE STREETS QUIET DOWN FOR THE NIGHT
THEN I CAN SNEAK IN AND FREE YOU!
AAAH!
YOU WOULD THINK THAT PEOPLE NEED THEIR SLEEP, EVEN CAPADORIANS!


How odd, now, to try to remember back to the time before I'd become the sigil's master
When I could still surprise myself with new discoveries...
. all the while burdened by the heart-twisting pain of recognizing my Uncle Ilahn's true nature
Now he's just one of many monsters I've faced.

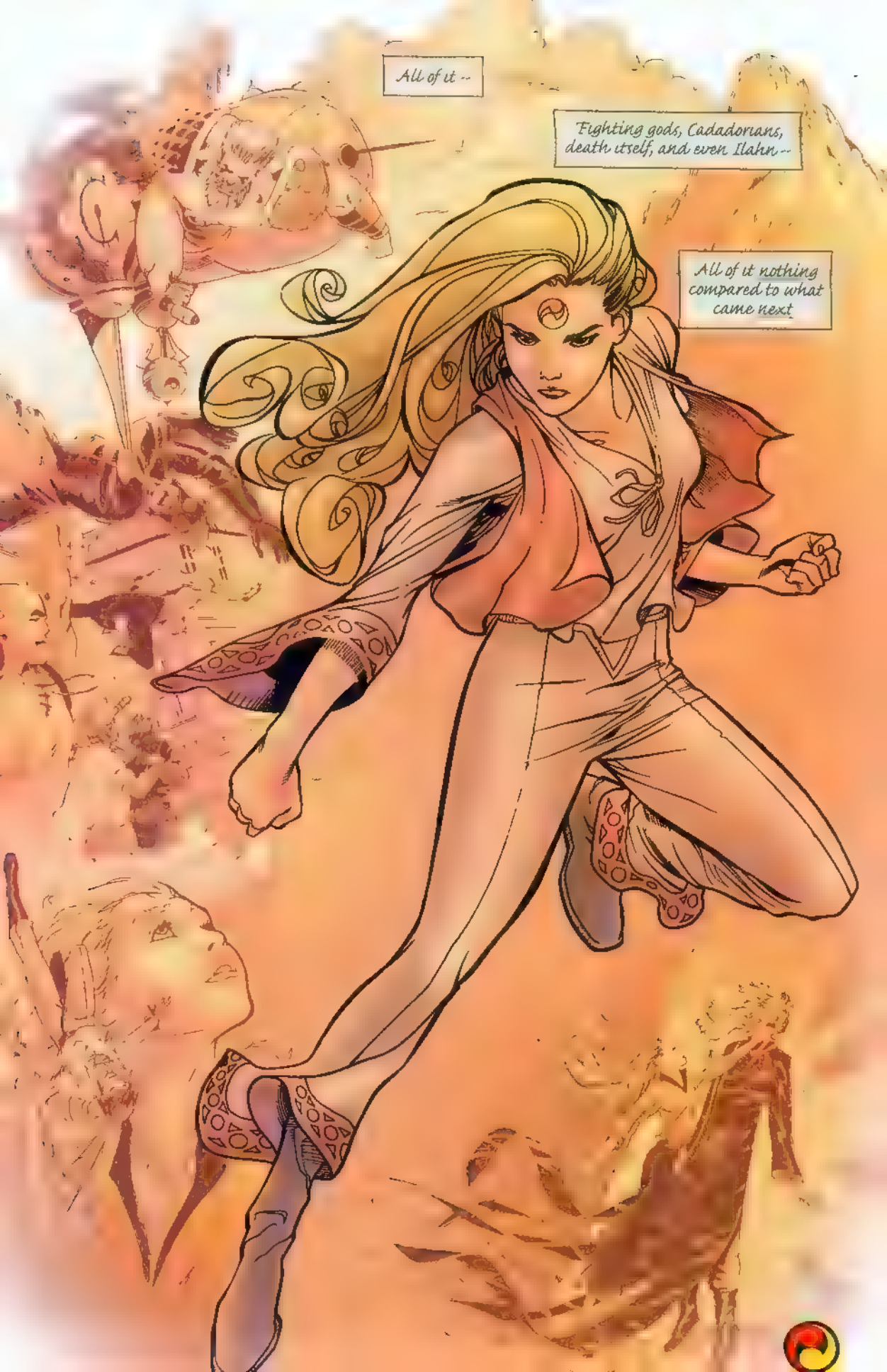
UNNNNGH
SEPHIE?
HOW DID YOU SAVE US?
SEPHIE?
WHERE ARE YOU?
GNGH
GRAAAAAHG

SEPHIE!
DOES ANYBODY SEE HER?
IS ANYBODY ELSE *MISSING*?
WE'RE *ALL* MISSING-- WHERE *ARE* WE?
ALIVE, FOR NOW
THAT'S ENOUGH TO KNOW, ISN'T IT?
THIS IS A TRAP OF SOME KIND--
WATCH YOUR BACK!
IT'S AN EFFECTIVE ONE NOTE THE LACK OF EXITS
THERE *MUST* BE A WAY OUT ALL COLORS FADE TO BLACK IN THE SHADOWS-
WE JUST CAN'T *SEE* IT!
SEPHIE?
EASY DANEYN
I'M *FINE*, RASE JUST WOOZY
SEPHIE'S NOT IN HERE
EASY, CRENNER-
THIS ISN'T THE FIRST STRANGE WIND WE'VE SURVIVED WHILE CREWING THE SUNSHIP
THINGS GENERALLY TURN OUT FOR THE BEST
BUT *SEPHIE* DIDN'T CAUSE THE WIND THAT SWEPT US HERE RHYNE, AND SHE'S *MISSING*!


So many feelings, all so new and strong.
Love
Fear.
Triumph.
Friendship.
Loss
Horror

GNYAAH!
DENY ME AT YOUR OWN RISK, YOU
REESHA, PLEASE LISTEN!

LISTEN
LISTEN TO YOU TELL ME HOW YOU'RE LEAVING ME BEHIND WHILE YOU TRAIPSE OFF TO VISIT WITH YOUR *PEERS?*
ILAHN, WITH THE POWER YOU WIELD, YOU COULD *RULE* THIS WORLD, AND THEN *OTHERS!* BUT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR NIECE HAS YOU SO BLINDED TO POSSIBILITY--!
I HATE SEEING YOU SO *CONSUMED* BY HER
MY NIECE HAS NO CONTROL OVER ME
AND SOON I WILL HAVE COMPLETE CONTROL OVER HER, THEN DEMETRIA, THEN MORE
BE PATIENT WITH ME, REESHA, AND I WILL DELIVER YOU *WORLDS*
JUST GIVE ME A PART IN THEIR TAMING, ILAHN I AM TOO STRONG TO BE CONTENT WITH STAYING BEHIND
SOON, MY DEAR
SOON


All of it --
Fighting gods, Cadadorians, death itself, and even Ilahn --
All of it nothing compared to what came next

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Far away on the world of Demetria,

explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

One of these islands is Meridian, home of shipbuilders and Sephie. Sephie has become the Minister of Meridian after her father Turos' death. Her uncle Ilahn is the Minister of the rich city-state of Cadador, which controls most of the shipping and trade on Demetria.

A mysterious force has endowed both Sephie and Ilahn with power – opposing forces – Ilahn's destruction versus Sephie's renewal.

Ilahn wants to control Sephie – and Meridian – but Sephie has been fighting to resist Ilahn's control of herself and Demetria's commerce. The conflict between them erupts into a battle, during which Ilahn disappears...apparently dead at Sephie's hands. Sephie takes control of Cadador, but the Ministry is taken from her by Reesha Teramu. The sunship's mission continues peacefully, with Sephie unaware that Ilahn has secretly resurfaced in Cadador but is content to leave Reesha operating as Minister in order to covertly pursue his vendetta against Sephie.

Swept away by a wild wind, Sephie wakes up to find herself in an inexplicable cavern with no way out except to follow the Muse of Giatan. Leaving behind her sleeping crew, she makes her way through a maze-like trail that becomes a wormhole leading to Danik's secret library. There she is given a strange orb, a device to record memories and impressions. Holding it, she begins the tale of her life to this point.

Meanwhile, Sephie's first love, Jad, watches the stars and thinks of her. The object of gossip from the Cadadorian guards, he is soon the object of their punishment after he snaps back at their whispers. His friend Feabie holds the keys to his escape, but can't make a move until there's no more movement on the streets...

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Across the universe, there are so many worlds, ruled in so many ways, that all have but one thing in common.
the ability to misunderstand each other
No matter how good-hearted we may be, or kind.
we can be misled.
LORD BIRREMA!
THE MASTER RETURNS!
SOLUSSAH KEEP THEE, MASTER!
The tragedies that result are therefore not the work of evil, but of the failure to comprehend truth in an unfamiliar context.

MORE OF THEM CONGREGATE AT MY STEPS EVERY DAY
FAVOR US, MIGHTY BIRREMA!
YOU TEST ME SOLUSSAH
BUT WHAT GOOD IS GREAT POWER AGAINST A FAMINE?
ALMS!
HEED OUR CRIES O GREAT MASTER!
HALT
LEARUA?
KLANCK
SAVE US, LORD BIRREMA!
LORD BIRREMA!
THANK SOLUSSAH FOR YOUR SWIFT RETURN!
THE INTRUDER IS WITHIN
YOUR FAMILY HAS BEEN MOVED TO THE OUTER PALACE
YOU HAVE MY THANKS, LEARUA
HE'S DONE NO DAMAGE MY LORD NOR MADE ANY DEMANDS BUT HIS SUDDEN APPEARANCE FROM NOWHERE PROMPTED MY CONCERN
YOU DID WELL TO CALL ME, WISE WOMAN
I SHALL SEE TO THIS VISITOR

SOLUSSAH BE WITH YOU, MY SON!
AS SHE HAS GIVEN ME THE TOOLS TO PROTECT HER WORLD, I *WILL*
-AS EVER
BE HER *SWORD* AND *SHIELD*, KEEPING IT AND ALL COURABO PEOPLE PROTECTED IN *HER* NAME!
BY THE LIVING FLAME OF HER CREATION, WHO VIOLATES THE PALACE OF SOLUSSAH?

I AM ILAHN OF DEMETRIA--
AND I HAVE COME TO OFFER YOU A SIMPLE EXCHANGE OF SERVICES I BELIEVE WILL BE OF MUTUAL BENEFIT

ANYWAY
ME, ILAHN OF DEMETRIA!
HOW DID YOU GAIN ENTRY INTO THE PALACE?
NOTE THE SIGIL, MUCH LIKE YOUR OWN IT ALLOWS ME TO TRAVEL BETWEEN LOCATIONS WITH A THOUGHT
BY THE LIGHT--!
I THOUGHT SOLUSSAH HAD GRACED ONLY ONE!
ONLY ONE ON THIS WORLD
A WORLD, I CAN'T HELP BUT OBSERVE, YOU HAVE FAILED TO PROPERLY MANAGE
YOU HAVE AN INEQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES WHICH HAS LED TO THE SOCIAL DISCIPLINE PROBLEM I GLIMPSED OUTSIDE, HENCE MY OFFER OF EXCHANGE--
YOU HAVE GREAT EXPERTISE IN COMBAT
I HAVE GREAT EXPERTISE IN BUSINESS
I HAVE ATTEMPTED TO RULE MY WORLD JUSTLY, BUT I AM PLAGUED BY AN IMMATURE TROUBLEMAKER, ANOTHER HOLDER OF THE MARK WE BOTH BEAR
HELP ME QUELL MY TROUBLE AND I WILL GUIDE YOU OUT OF YOUR QUAGMIRE HERE
AGREED?

AGREED
Agreed
AGREED
AGREED

THEN MAY I BID YOU WELCOME, MY FRIENDS, TO THE WORLD OF DEMETRIA
A WORLD WITH ONE TOO MANY SIGIL BEARERS
FORTUNATELY

WE WILL SOON RECTIFY THAT LITTLE NUISANCE
PSSSSST!
LET'S GO!

JAD!
COME ON! WE'VE GOT TO TRY TO GET OUT OF HERE BEFORE THE GUARDS CIRCLE AGAIN!
FEABIE
AFTER WHAT YOU DID
I'M NOT GOING ANYWHERE WITH YOU

WHAT?!?

OH, NO

YOU DON'T GET TO TREAT ME THAT WAY JAR TAKARTY!

I RISKED MY OWN FREEDOM TO GET IN HERE AND LET YOU GO, SO YOU ARE GOING TO GET UP AND MARCH YOUR HURT TAIL OUT OF HERE!

GET UP, JAD WHEN YOU COME BACK TO YOUR SENSES YOU'LL REALIZE THAT YOU'RE DOING YOURSELF NO GOOD BY BEING SO STUBBORN

JUST LET ME DIE HERE FEABLE

AHHHH! I HEAR SOMETHING!

OKAY, YOU WIN
JAP! SHHHHH!
I'M SURE I HEARD
SOME ONE
WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
OH MY!

REMEMBERING RECORDING ALL THIS FOR YOU, DANIK
~IT MAKES ME WONDER IF ?
THE LOGBOOK - MY MOTHER'S SKETCHES?
WAS THAT ALL YOUR DOING?
WAS IT NEVER REAL?
IT EXISTED, SEPHIE
IT WAS DESTROYED, THEN RECREATED FOR YOUR BENEFIT, YET IT IS AS IT WAS
I'M GLAD OF THAT
BUT THE COMPULSION TO COME HERE?
THAT WAS FROM YOU?
FROM AN ASPECT OF ME YES, AND AGAINST MY WISHES BUT PERHAPS I WAS WISER THAN I KNOW

I WOULD LIKE TO TELL YOU A PART OF MY STORY
BUT FIRST YOU'LL NEED TO BE ABLE TO SEE IT
WHAAA -!
THE UNIVERSAL ENERGIES ARE ALL AROUND US
OH LOOK! I CAN SEE THEM!
LESS SO HERE THAN IN SOME OF THE RICHER REGIONS THIS IS THE SOURCE OF YOUR POWER, THE POTENTIAL YOU FORCE INTO REALITY
SEPHIE, THIS IS WHAT WE MUST PROTECT

A CONFLAGRATION OF UNIVERSAL POWER LOOMS, A WAR THAT WILL DETERMINE THE SURVIVAL OR DESTRUCTION OF *ALL* THAT WE KNOW

ALL SIGIL-BEARERS WILL BE CALLED TO COMBAT

MANY WILL BE LOST

MY TACTICAL CLAIRVOYANCE ALLOWS ME TO KNOW WHAT PIECES SHOULD BE PLAYED TO ENSURE THE GREATEST HOPE OF VICTORY -

WITHOUT THE CERTAINTY OF FACT

I AM A *SCIENTIST* FORCED TO RELY ON *FAITH* IN MY VISIONS

YOU FIGURE INTO THIS WAR SEPHIE

DUTY CALLS THE TWO SIGIL BEARERS FROM DEMETRIA TO COME TOGETHER IN WAR

WHAT?

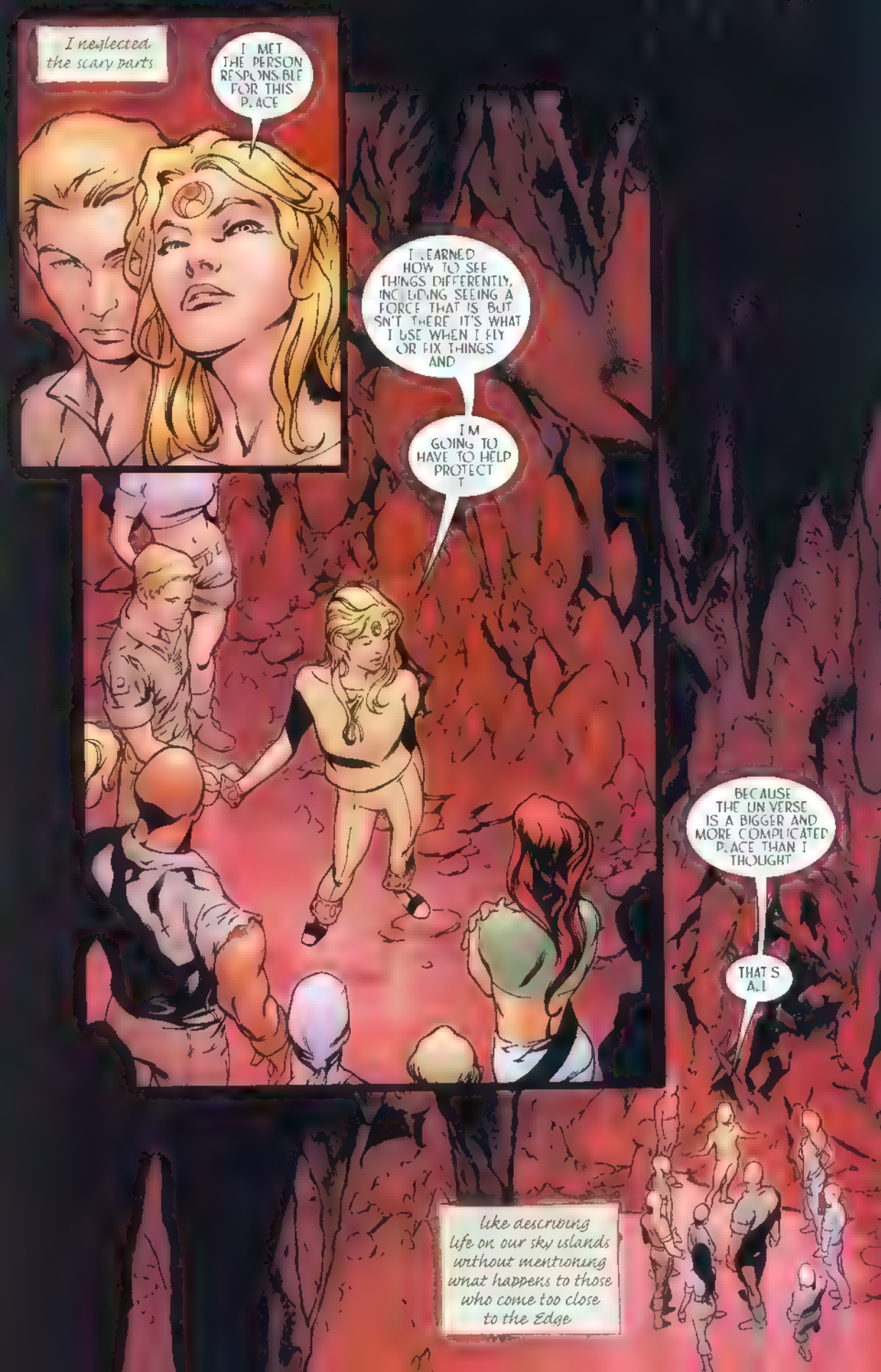
ME FIGHT AT ILAHN'S SIDE?

NEVER!

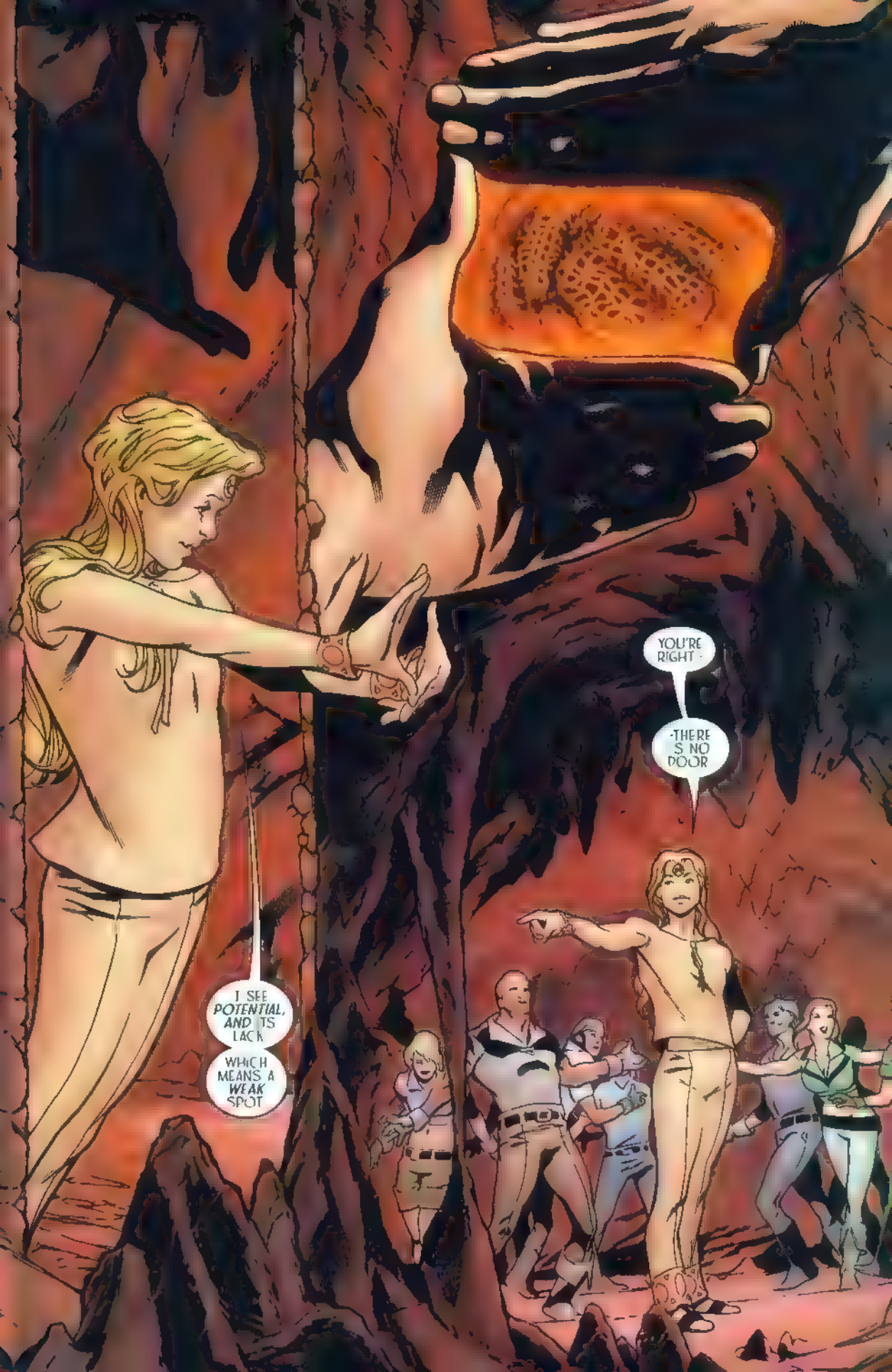
I MADE YOU THIS PROMISE ONCE~ DID YOU HEAR ME?
I *ACCEPT THAT*! HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO AID THE POWER WHO GAVE ME THIS SIGIL, AND PROTECT MY WORLD FROM *ALL* DANGERS
I'LL *BE* YOUR SOLDIER! I'LL *FIGHT* YOUR WAR
BUT I AM RESPONSIBLE TO *DEMETRIA*, NOT TO YOU!
YOU *CAN'T* ASK ME TO SIDE WITH ILAHN--*HE* DOESN'T CARE ABOUT DEMETRIA HE'S PROVEN HE WOULD *DESTROY* OUR WORLD FOR HIS OWN SELF-AGGRANDIZEMENT!
AND HE *IS* ALIVE ISN'T HE? THIS IS YOUR WAY OF TELLING ME ISN'T IT?
WHAT DO *YOU* BELIEVE?

I BELIEVE--!
I believe now; more than ever, that there is no power on this or any world that can frighten me as much as standing up to that man.
I BELIEVE
I believe that as much as I'd like to make Demetria my only responsibility, I am forever tied to other worlds.
I BELIEVE I'M GOING HOME NOW!
AND I NEEDED TO HAVE SOMEONE ELSE TO SHARE THE BURDEN OF KNOWING OF THE EXISTENCE OF THIS REPOSITORY
WELL DONE CHILD
I believe he knew then what would have to be sacrificed.
Could I, bearing a burden of that weight, keep from asking others to help in its bearing?

Yes, I could
And I did
SEPHIE!
SEPHIE! YOU'RE BACK!
THERE SHE IS!
SEPHIE! I KNEW YOU'D RETURN!
WHERE WERE YOU?
GONE FOR A WHILE SORRY TO HAVE FRIGHTENED YOU
I told them nothing
Well, nearly nothing


I neglected the scary parts
I MET THE PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS PLACE
I LEARNED HOW TO SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY, INCLUDING SEEING A FORCE THAT IS BUT ISN'T THERE. IT'S WHAT I USE WHEN I FLY OR FIX THINGS. AND
I'M GOING TO HAVE TO HELP PROTECT IT
BECAUSE THE UNIVERSE IS A BIGGER AND MORE COMPLICATED PLACE THAN I THOUGHT
THAT'S ALL
like describing life on our sky islands without mentioning what happens to those who come too close to the Edge

BIG, S IT?
NOT THAT WE COULD TELL BEING STUCK IN A CAVE WITH NO DOORS OR SKYLIGHTS
ON THE BRIGHT SIDE, WE'LL HAVE PLENTY OF TIME FOR SPECULATION ABOUT IT WHILE WE SLOWLY STARVE, OR DIE OF THIRST
I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU HAVE SUCH A CHEERY OUTLOOK REGARDING OUR PROSPECTS!
LITTLE GIRL, UNLESS YOU HAVE SOME MAGIC KEY FROM THE MAGICIAN WHO BUILT THIS TRICK, YOU'D BETTER BE PREPARED TO GET ALL OF US OUT OF HERE THE WAY YOU GOT BACK IN!
COTSON, YOU'RE LOOKING AT THIS ALL WRONG
THERE'S A HIDDEN LAYER TO EVERYTHING WHERE YOU SEE NOTHING BUT LIMITATION


I SEE POTENTIAL, AND ITS LACK
WHICH MEANS A WEAK SPOT
YOU'RE RIGHT -
-THERE S NO DOOR

"...UNTIL I MAKE ONE!"
CHOOOM
WE'VE GOT A JOURNEY TO CONTINUE
SO LET'S GO FIND OUR SHIP!
There I was. Sephie
...Minister of Meridian
Captain of the sunship Unity
Soon to be Warrior of the Universe
Nursing a fear that crawled from my belly to my brain, spewing poison through every inch of vitals
...a bearable, but unsharable, burden

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Ilahn has gathered a band of Sigil-Bearers to help him solve a discipline problem... Sephie. She's just been to a strange repository of knowledge secreted inside the Bleak Zone near Demetria. There she meets Danik, a being of immense power who collects from her, in her own words, the story of her experiences after being changed into a Sigil-Bearer. Pledging her support in the war brewing in the bigger universe but refusing to fight at Ilahn's side, Sephie triggers her return to Demetria. Joining her crew, she amazes them with her newfound ability to see the energies she is able to manipulate.

Back on Cadador, Sephie's friend Feabie sneaks inside the prison to free Jad, even though she knows his next move will be to follow Sephie, not to thank her. Before Feabie can convince Jad to leave, they are surprised by a Cadadorian guard...

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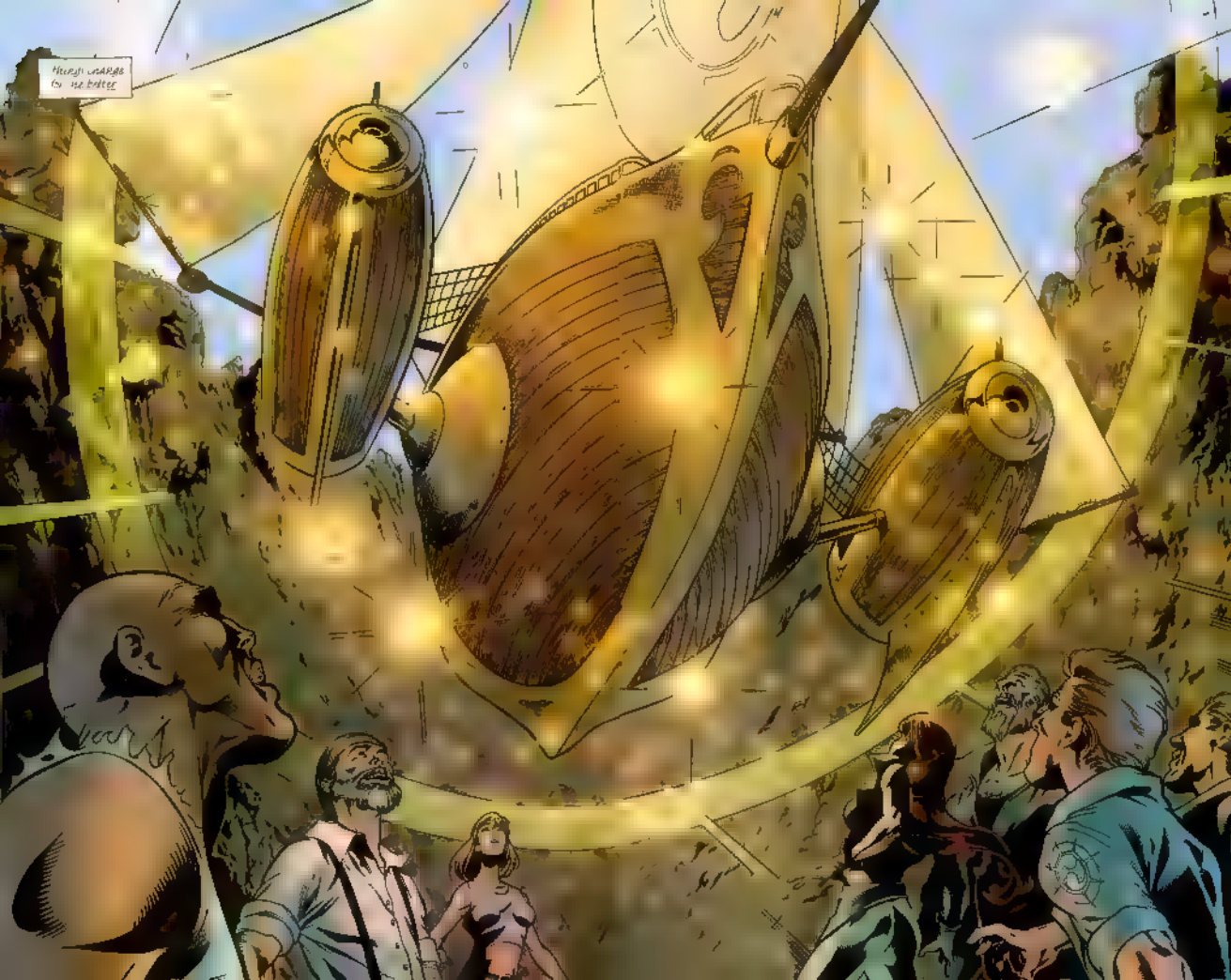
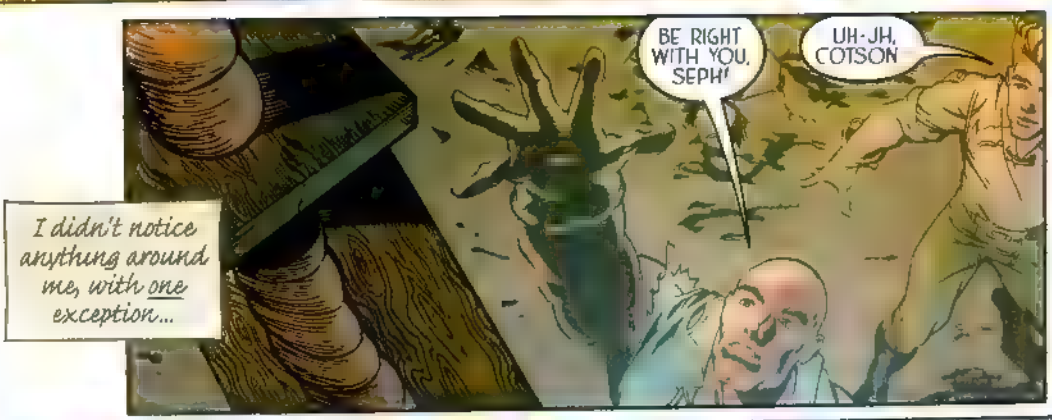
Things change.
Sometimes the air itself is heavier, the weight of our sorrows collecting until the sky can hold no more and lets them fall as tears of rain
...to return to the world as flowers.
Everything changes, sometimes in seasons..
...more often in sudden squalls.
TOO BAD WE CAN'T FLY LIKE YOU, SEPH -- LOOKS LIKE WE'RE GROUNDED HERE
EVEN IF WE TRIED TO MEND THIS BROKEN BARREL OF A SHIP, WHAT'S LEFT UNSPLINTERED NO LONGER FLOATS

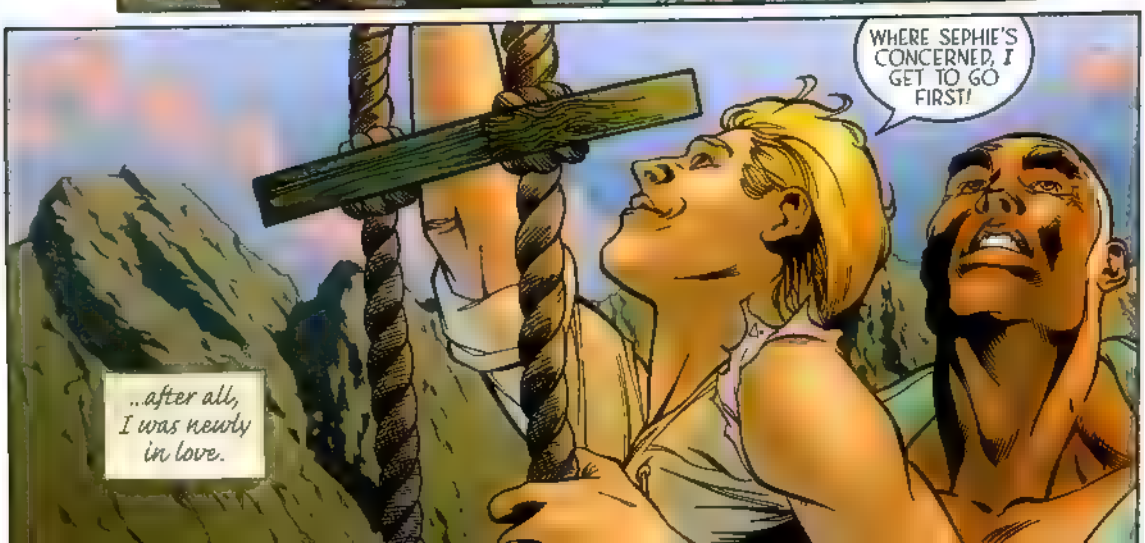
NOT NECESSARILY
CAN YOU FIX IT, SEPHIE?
WE'LL SEE
I CAN SEE LIKE LINES OF ENERGY
ITS POTENTIAL STILL EXISTS
POTENTIAL-- FAUGH!
WE'RE GOING TO DIE HERE IN THIS DITCH, FAR AWAY FROM HOME AND HEARTH
AND WATERING HOLE?
SEEMS TO ME IT'S NOT HOME YOU MISS SO MUCH AS CERTAIN SCENTS, NAMELY ROTTING GRAINS AND OLD APPLES
YOU'RE A CRUEL MAN, WIL COTSON
AN HONEST ONE, BUT CRUEL, TO TORTURE A DYING MAN SO.
DANEYN WILL PROTECT ME FROM YOUR WIT, WON'T YOU, GIRL?
HA.
DOES IT HURT, DREN?
JUST MY HEART, CEREG IT FEELS LIKE THE DREAM OF UNITY IS AS BROKEN AS THE SUNSHIP

" UNLESS SHE CAN MAKE IT WHOLE"
SHE IS! LOOK!
I SEE! CAN YOU BELIEVE IT, HILMAN?
OR CAN'T YOU SEE THAT FAR FROM YOUR ELEVATION?
NOW, NOW-
"~DON'T YOU MAKE LIGHT OF OUR MIRACLE, DEEKSOHN!
"JUST LOOK AT THAT!"
Things do always change...
...but sometimes...
...with our hard work and determination...



I was so blind that day, but not because of the sun.
My eyes were turned inward, marveling at the ease with which I could now braid the faint lines of power that danced all around me...
COME ON UP!
...into a force as real and binding as the sturdiest rope


I didn't notice anything around me, with one exception...
BE RIGHT WITH YOU, SEPH!
UH-JH, COTSON


WHERE SEPHIE'S CONCERNED, I GET TO GO FIRST!
...after all, I was newly in love.

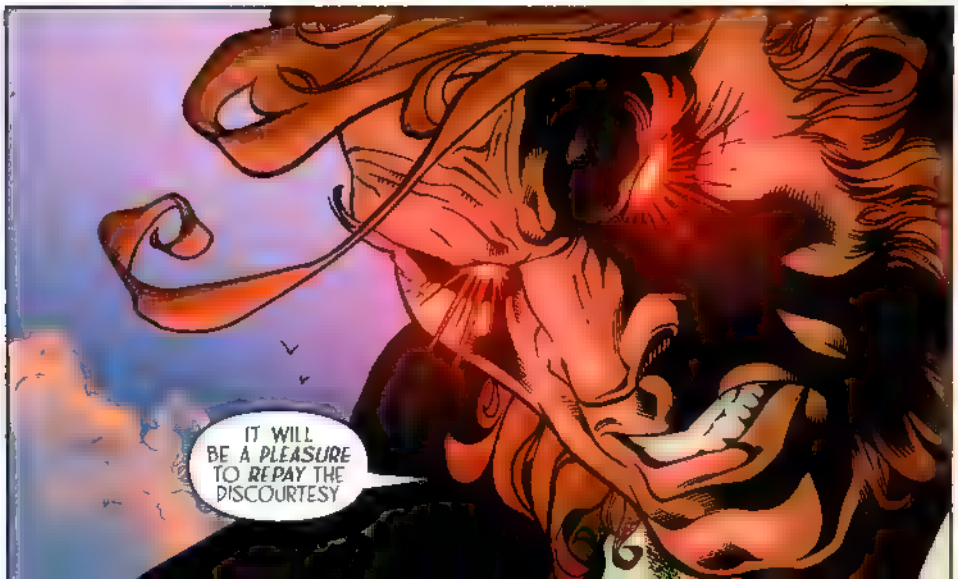
What else was there to see besides the boy smiling up at me?
Although a certain shyness kept me aloft...
...mixed with a little stubborn uncertainty...
...still, flight was my joy given wings by my sigil.
ODD LIGHT, THAT
OH, THAT'S JUST SEPHIE PLAYING AROUND
SEPHIE?
SEPH~

SEPHIE!
UNGRATEFUL CHILD NOW YOU WILL LEARN TO RESPECT YOUR ELDER KIN!
WHAT?
Trapped!
WHO ARE--?
NO!
STAY AWAY FROM MY SHIP!
My captor was powerful enough, yet the sense of self that radiated through him was his true strength
Will and arms combined might have been enough to hold me fast...
...but no one had the strength to keep me from protecting my crew!
Especially not since I'd seen who accompanied him...
my Uncle Ilahn
A-HEY THE SHIP, AS YOU SAY
BY THE AUTHORITY OF ILAHN OF CADADOR--
--YOUR SHIP WILL BE DETAINED
MAKE NO ATTEMPTS TO MOVE THIS SHIP
YOUR MISSION IS OVER

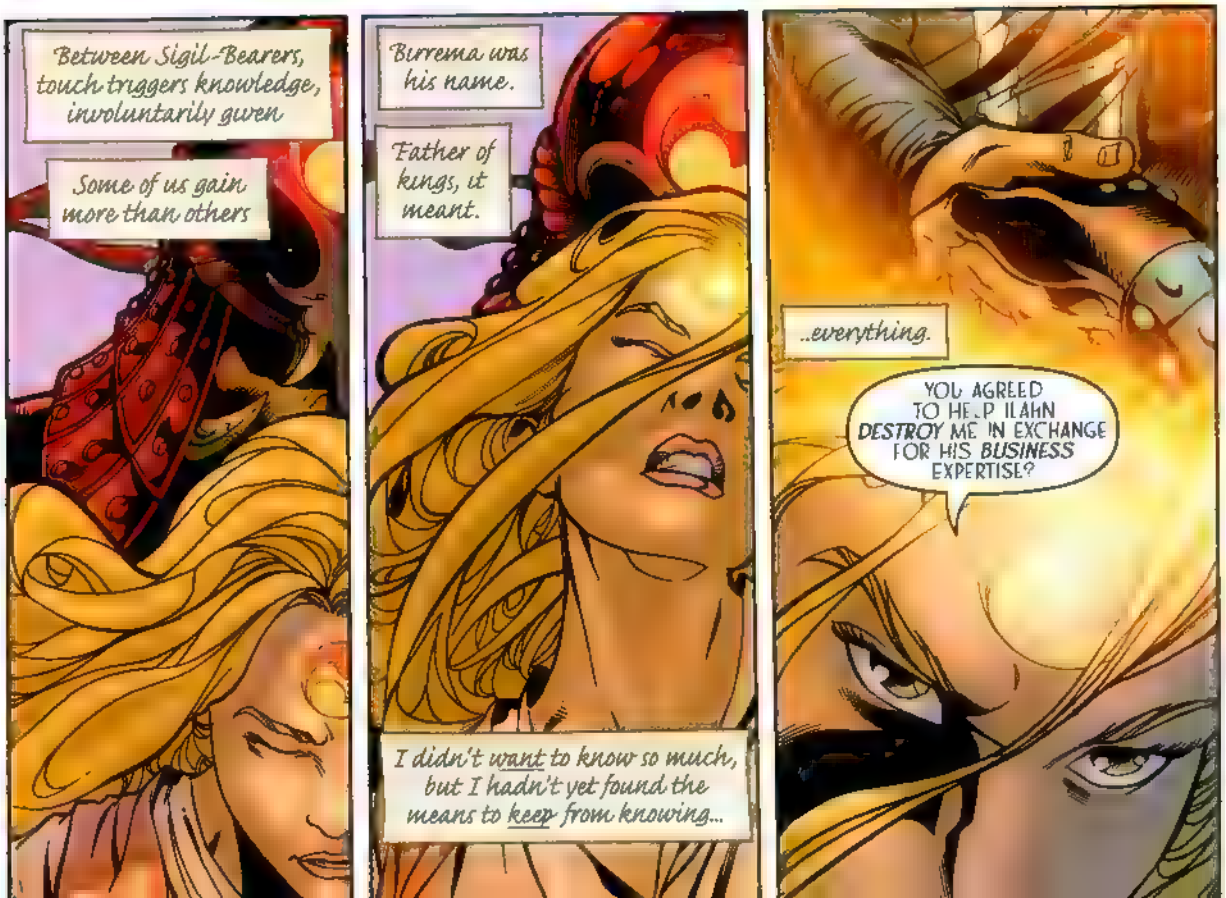
YOU WILL ALL BE ESCORTED TO CADAPOR'S PRISONS TO—
UNNF!

THIS IS HER DOING!

HOLD HER! SHE MUST USE HER HANDS TO WORK HER POWER!
DISRESPECTFUL LITTLE BRAT


IT WILL BE A PLEASURE TO REPAY THE DISCOURTESY

AS YOU CAN SEE, SHE IS WILLFUL AND DISOBEDIENT
SHE HAS NOT YET LEARNED TO RESPECT HER BETTERS.
COME CLOSER--
I'LL SHOW YOU WHAT I'VE LEARNED!
TEMPER, TEMPER, MINISTER OF MERIDIAN
WE ARE IN THE PRESENCE OF VISITORS


Between Sigil-Bearers, touch triggers knowledge, involuntarily given
Some of us gain more than others
Burrema was his name.
Father of kings, it meant.
I didn't want to know so much, but I hadn't yet found the means to keep from knowing...
..everything.
YOU AGREED TO HELP ILAHN DESTROY ME IN EXCHANGE FOR HIS BUSINESS EXPERTISE?

I AM A KING I MUST SOMETIMES ACCEPT DIFFICULT DECISIONS TO ENSURE THE BEST OUTCOME FOR MY PEOPLE
YOU'RE A SADLY INEXPERIENCED RULER IF YOU THINK ILAHN IS THE ONLY SOURCE OF HELP FOR YOUR DROUGHT PROBLEM!
BUT MY DEAR SEPHIE, YOU LACK MY DECORUM
THESE BEINGS ARE ADULTS, AND NOT LIKELY TO WANT TO TOLERATE A CHILD'S TANTRUMS
ESPECIALLY ONE WHO DOESN'T RESPECT AN ELDER OF HER OWN CLAN!
Ilahn spoke the truth.
I felt it in the grip of the man who held me.
I knew; as he knew them, that these people...
...the iron goddess Columella.
Neine of the feralfolk.
.Grenang the blacksmith.
Rulers, all .
.not one of them trusted me!
They believed Ilahn!
THERE APPEARS TO BE NO ESCAPE CLAUSE EMBEDDED IN THIS TRANSACTION, SEPHIE

WERE YOU TRYING TO HELP HIM *ESCAPE?*
I--
AAAH
YES, I WAS!
NO, FEABIE!
DON'T ADMIT ANYTHING TO HIM!
I MADE HER COME IN HERE! SHE'S INNOCENT!
I THOUGHT SO
PRETTY GUTSY FOR A MERIDIANITE
AND WHY *NOT?*
WE'RE ALL STRONGER THAN THE GIRLS HERE--
FEABIE!
SHHHHHH!
QUIET, OR *THEY'LL* HEAR YOU!
HUH?

YOU KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF OF HER!
I KNOW WHO YOU ARE! I KNOW WHAT YOU DID BREHN!
YOU'RE HIM? THE ONE WHO WAS BANISHED?
WOULD YOU TWO HOLD IT DOWN?
I MADE MY MISTAKES AND I'M LIVING WITH THE RESULT JAD TAKARTY, BUT I'M STILL A MERIDANITE AT HEART
YOU WANT OUT? COME ON, I'LL GET YOU OUTSIDE YOU DON'T DESERVE TO BE STUCK HERE ON CAPADOR
YOU'D DO THAT FOR US?
FEABIE?
THAT'S SO BRAVE
JUST FOLLOWING YOUR EXAMPLE
FEABIE, WAS IT?

YES!
WHEW! GLAD THAT RIDE'S OVER!
IT'S NOT OVER, COTSON! SEPHIE'S IN TROUBLE! WHAT DO WE DO?
WE SIT AND WAIT THIS IS OVER OUR HEADS KID
CAN'T YOU DO SOMETHING?
C'MON, GHETAN, I'D BEEN OVER EVERY INCH OF THIS SHIP THAT LOGBOOK WASN'T THERE BEFORE YOU GAVE IT TO HER

HELP HER!
MAYBE THE BATTLE IS THE HELP SHE NEEDS DEREN
WHA~
WHO DO YOU~!
WHY?
YOU WANT HER TO FIGHT THEM?
HOW DARE~!
NOT THE WISEST MOVE, CRENNER
BUT SEPHIE~!
NEEDS BIGGER HELP THAN US LUCKILY, SHE'S A BIG-WILLED KIND OF GAL US~
~WE'RE JUST THE LITTLE PEOPLE IN HER LIFE

I had, by that time, battled Ilahn, the celanaug, Rho Rhustane, entire squads of Cadadorian soldiers...
...but I'd never really been in an unfair fight.
This one seemed hopelessly weighted against me.

Yet, my first great battle was by the side of Samandahl Rey
...a champion of the starry void between worlds.
His knowledge taught me how to view a battle as a moving pattern
He used vast thinking machines to decipher the waves of attack and prepare a counterattack. He just as often used what he called "gut."
Such analytical thinking makes targets of monsters, allowing you to perceive them as a collection of approaching coordinates...
...not fearful threats.
That which can be comprehended can be countered.
For every threat, no matter its size.
has a flaw.

The most difficult monster to tame is the one that is inside.
Papa taught me how to hide my emotions while during difficult negotiations, keeping a calm face.
But Papa never really listened well
Yeah, always changes that a certain woman he are. s it's her side
I imagine if Dhalsim and Ryu
I see where he got it from.
He may be weak, today but tomorrow, I'll make more battle I light
He will - will have to remember me exact
WHAKK
NO!!

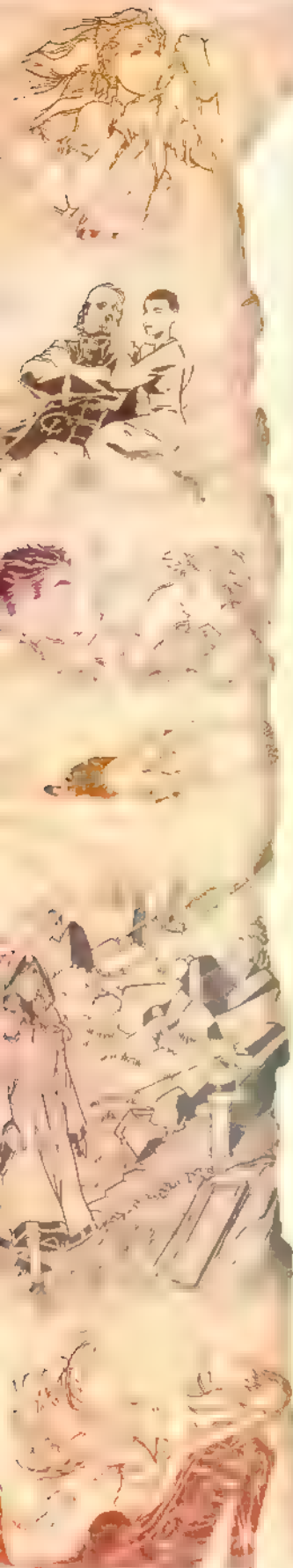
...surprise

IT CANNOT HAVE HAPPENED SO EASILY
SHE'S DEAD!
SHE'S DEAD!
STARS TAKE YOU, GRENANG--!
YOU WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO KILL HER!
BUT, ILAHN, YOU STATED YOUR INTENT TO--
YES! MINE!
NOT YOU! ME!
ME!
HOW DARE YOU STEAL THAT FROM ME!
ILAHNNNNNGH!

MY NIECE IS DEAD--!
"--NOW NO ONE STANDS IN MY WAY!"
Things change.
Sometimes..
...they change forever.

MERIDIAN

CrossGen
#44 APRIL 2004



Far away on the world of Demetria,

explosions rocked the surface and gigantic rocks shot into the sky and stayed there. Settlers established great city-states on these ore-buoyant islands, using floating ships to move between them.

One of these islands is Meridian, home of shipbuilders and Sephie. Sephie has become the Minister of Meridian after her father Turos' death. Her uncle Ilahn is the Minister of the rich city-state of Cadador, which controls most of the shipping and trade on Demetria.

A mysterious force has endowed both Sephie and Ilahn with power – opposing forces – Ilahn's destruction versus Sephie's renewal.

Ilahn wants to control Sephie – and Meridian – but Sephie has been fighting to resist Ilahn's control of herself and Demetria's commerce. While she has gathered a crew of sailors to unite Demetria against Ilahn, he has been busy gathering other Sigil-Bearers to capture and control Sephie. During their battle, Sephie is fatally injured by one of Ilahn's allies, against his orders. Now Sephie lies dying as Ilahn kills the man who hurt her. The crew of Sephie's sunship waits anxiously nearby, especially Crenner, who has begun a romance with Sephie.

Meanwhile, in Cadador, Sephie's first love Jad and friend Feabie are caught in their escape from jail by a Cadadorian guard with ties to Meridian and an instant admiration for Feabie...

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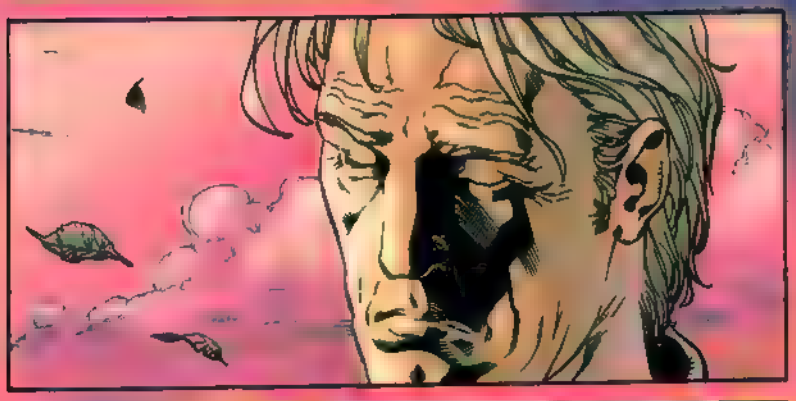
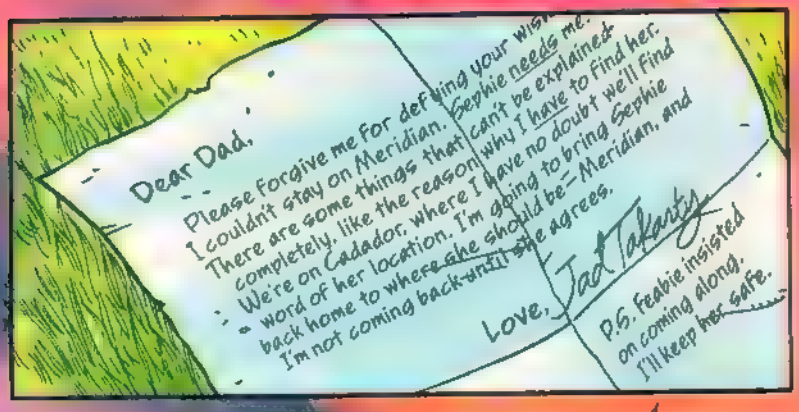
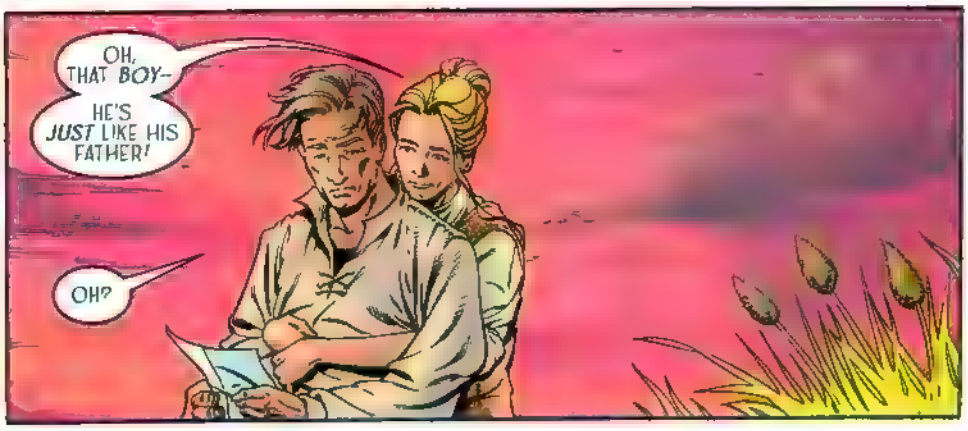
Jon Takanty
Regent
Island of
Meridian

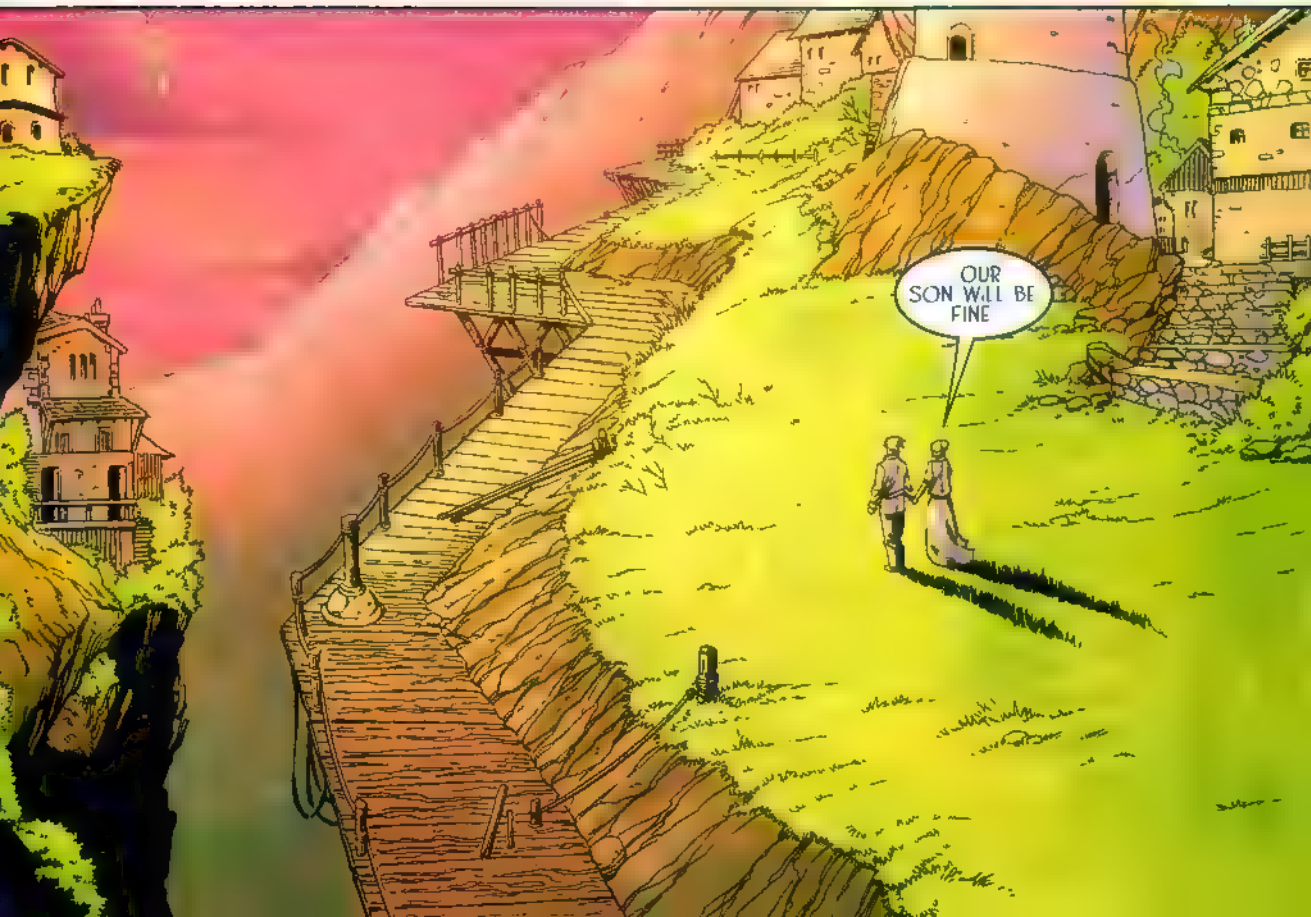


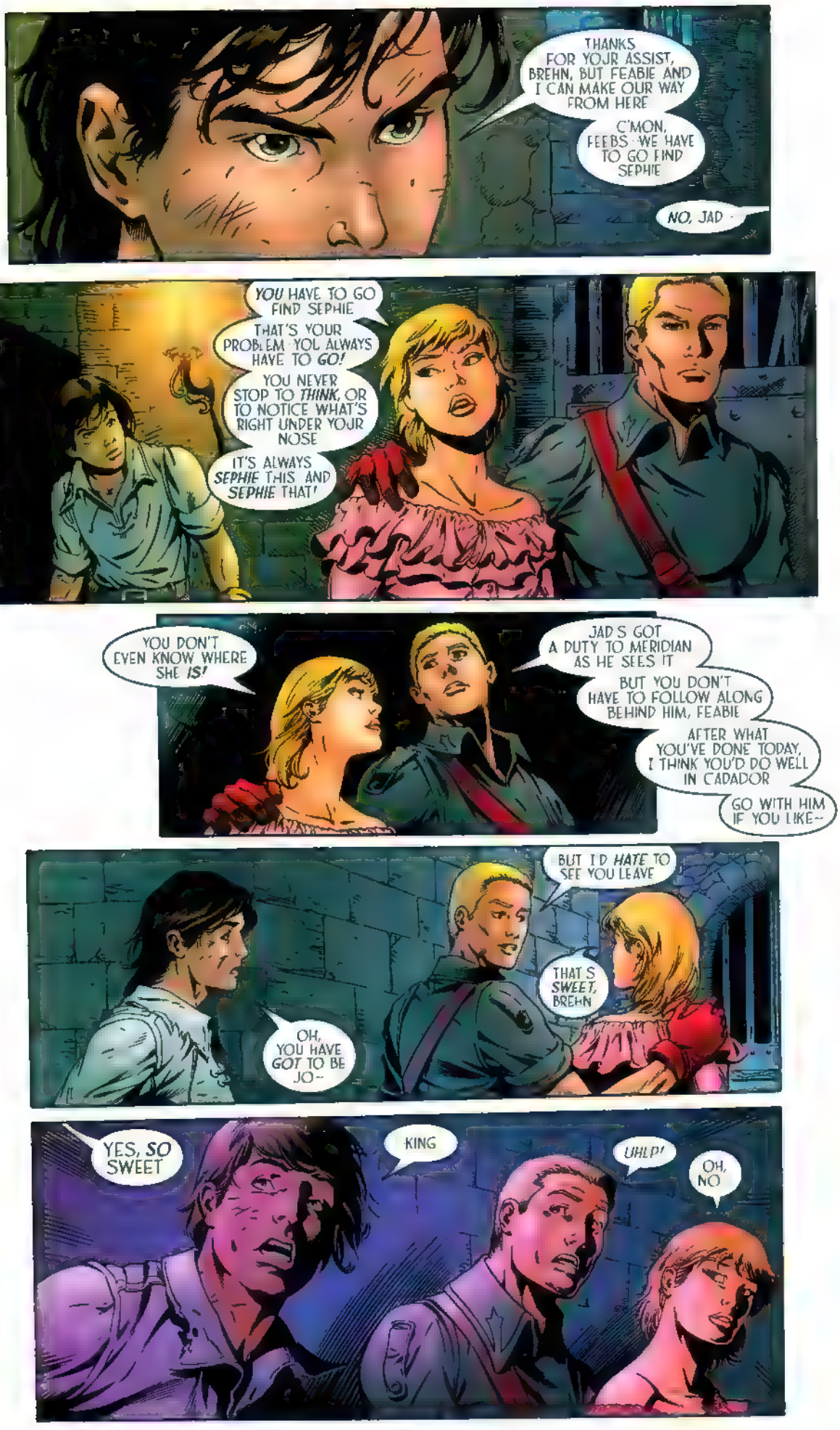

Dear Dad,
Please forgive me for defying your wishes. Sephie needs me. I couldn't stay on Meridian. There are some things that can't be explained completely, like the reason why I have to find her. We're on Cadador, where I have no doubt we'll find word of her location. I'm going to bring Sephie back home to where she should be—Meridian, and I'm not coming back until she agrees.
Love, Jad Takanty
P.S. Feabie insisted on coming along. I'll keep her safe.

OK, JAD


OH, THAT *BOY*–
HE'S *JUST* LIKE HIS FATHER!
OH?

THAT OLD FOOL? WHY, *WHO'D* MARRY *HIM*, MIRA?
NONE BUT ANOTHER OLD FOOL, I SUPPOSE
COME ALONG, JON


OUR SON WILL BE FINE


THANKS FOR YOJR ASSIST, BREHN, BUT FEABIE AND I CAN MAKE OUR WAY FROM HERE
C'MON, FEEBS · WE HAVE TO GO FIND SEPHIE
NO, JAD
YOU HAVE TO GO FIND SEPHIE
THAT'S YOUR PROBLEM · YOU ALWAYS HAVE TO GO!
YOU NEVER STOP TO THINK, OR TO NOTICE WHAT'S RIGHT UNDER YOJR NOSE
IT'S ALWAYS SEPHIE THIS AND SEPHIE THAT!
YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE SHE IS!
JAD S GOT A DUTY TO MERIDIAN AS HE SEES IT
BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO FOLLOW ALONG BEHIND HIM, FEABIE
AFTER WHAT YOU'VE DONE TODAY, I THINK YOU'D DO WELL IN CADADOR
GO WITH HIM IF YOU LIKE~
BUT I D HATE TO SEE YOU LEAVE
THAT S SWEET, BREHN
OH, YOU HAVE GOT TO BE JO~
YES, SO SWEET
KING
UHLP!
OH, NO

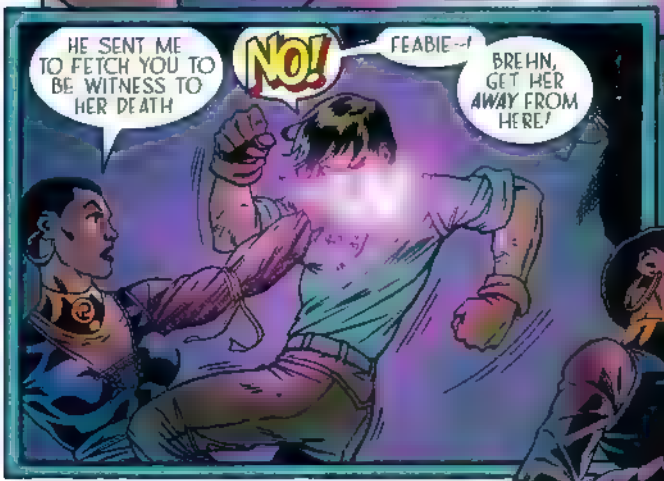
IT WAS A LITTLE TROUBLESOME FINDING YOU, SINCE ONE OF YOU IS SUPPOSED TO BE INSIDE THE JAIL--
HOW DID YOU COME TO BE OUT ON CAPADOR'S STREETS AGAIN, MASTER TAKARTY?
YOU--
HE WAS ESCAPING, BUT HE'S ABOUT TO BE RETURNED TO HIS CELL!
HUH?
WHAT -?
PLAY ALONG
LET ME GO, YOU MANGY CAPADORIAN PUKE!
JAD, JAD -
IT'S A SHAME YOU HAVE SUCH A POOR OPINON OF CAPADORIANS
YOU ARE, AFTER ALL, TRAVELING WITH ONE
IT'S A SAD TALE I FOUND HIDDEN IN CENSUS RECORDS-- A CHILD OF CAPADOR BORN ON THE WAY TO MERIDIAN, ORPHANED WHEN THE MOTHER DIED, BUT NOT BEFORE NAMING HER CHILD
FEABELYN DOURNE
OR FEABIE, FOR SHORT
ME?
WHY DO YOU THINK YOU WEREN'T JAILED, CITIZEN?

I'M SOMEBODY?
I'M

FEABIE!

HMMM
SEEMS YOU'VE BEEN TOSSED AWAY AGAIN, JAD
GLRK!
NO MATTER-- YOU ARE MY ONE CONCERN HERE
FEABIE!
BREHN

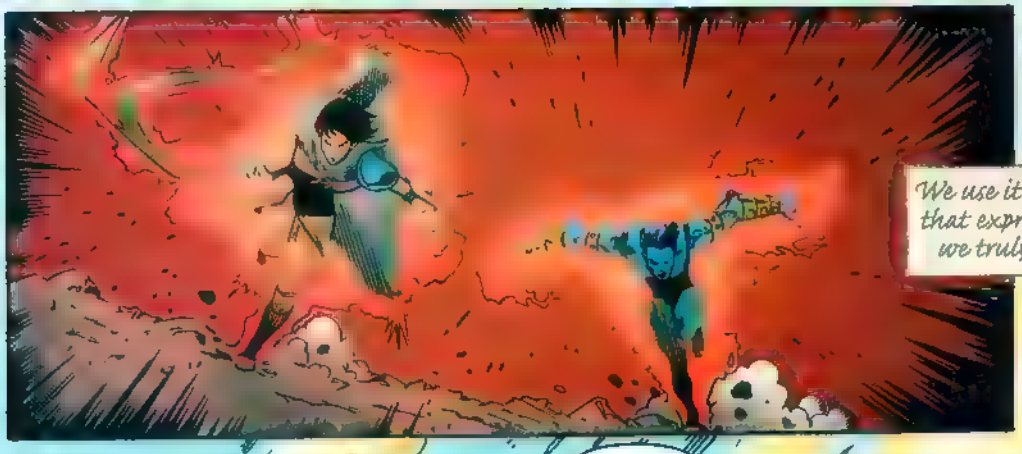
FEABIE --!
FORGET THE GIRL JAD
SHE'S FORGOTTEN YOU
LAHN, HOWEVER, HAS NOT


HE SENT ME TO FETCH YOU TO BE WITNESS TO HER DEATH
NO!
FEABIE --!
BREHN, GET HER AWAY FROM HERE!

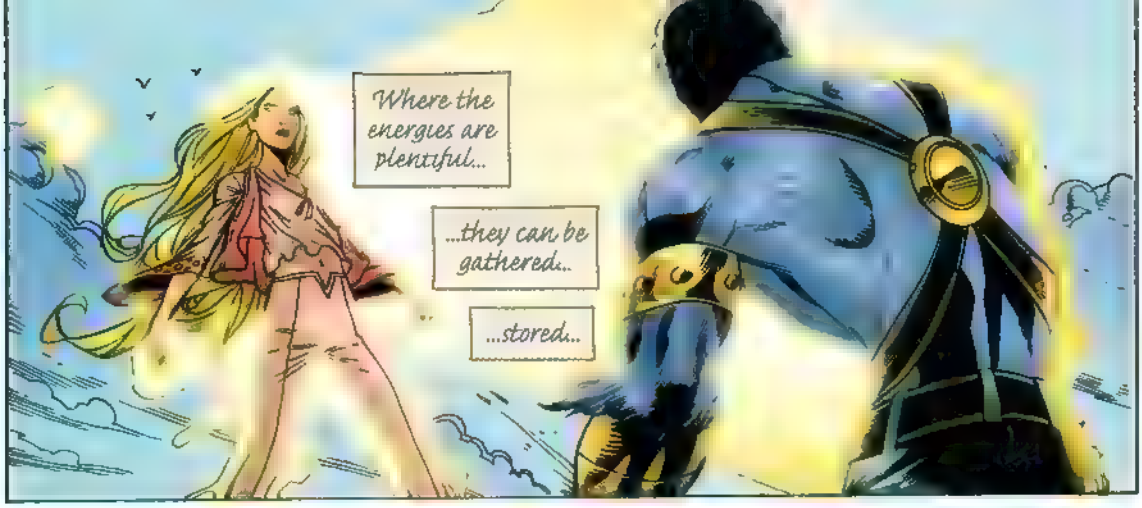
GO!
RUN!
I'M SORRY JAD!
YOU HEARD HIM- GO!

...if not inevitable.
THE CHILD IS ALIVE!
CAPTURE HER! QUICKLY!
YOU'RE AFRAID SHE'LL ESCAPE?
THINK, COLUMELLA, CAN THIS CHILD EVADE THREE BATTLE-HARDENED ADULTS?
I'VE FOUGHT AT INGRA'S SIDE -SEEN THE HORRORS OF GODS WARRING!
A good captain never takes flight without an advantageous wind and a sailor's trick or two...
I'VE SEEN A FEW BATTLES MYSELF, NEINE
UNNF!
GRAWWWR
...like the special sight that allows me to see the universal energies in use..
AND I CAN SEE HOW THIS ONE ENDS.
...and know their limit.

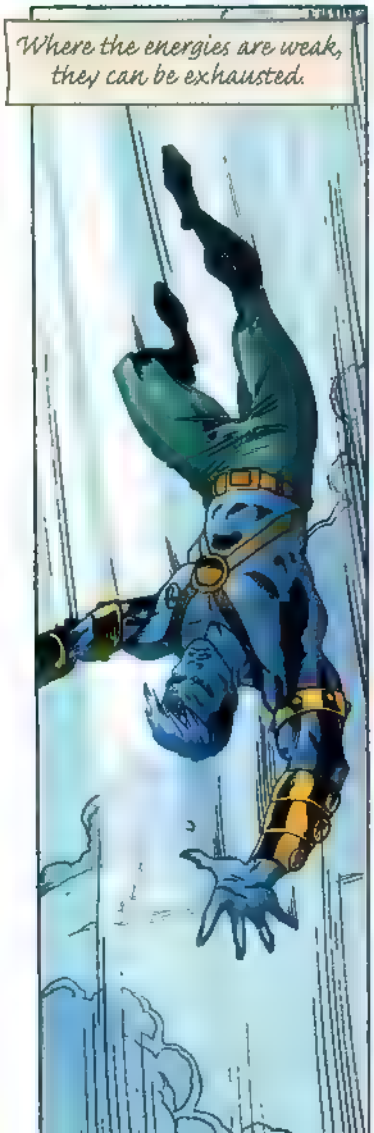
THE ANSWER IS SWIRL NG ALL AROUND US
The mark we bear, once given, connects us to a power we slowly come to understand

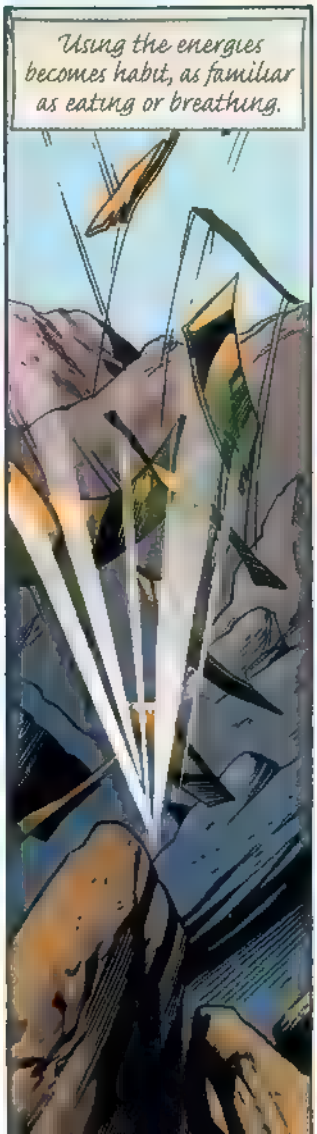

We use it in ways that express who we truly are...

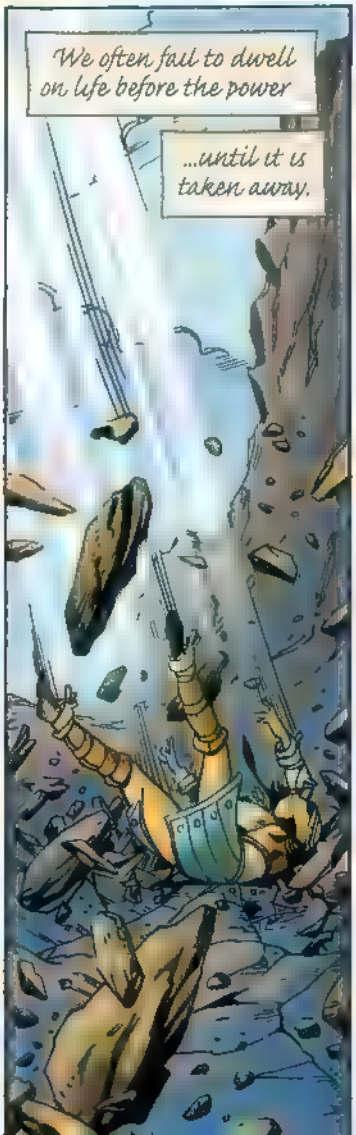
CAN'T YOU SEE IT?
without considering the extent of the source.


Where the energies are plentiful...
...they can be gathered...
...stored...

...or lost to another of our kind.


Where the energies are weak, they can be exhausted.


Using the energies becomes habit, as familiar as eating or breathing.


We often fail to dwell on life before the power
...until it is taken away.

If we are not prepared for this possibility, we can be beaten.
MY DEEPEST APOLOGIES, LORD BIRREMA
I HAVE WRONGED YOU FOR YOUR KINDNESS
BUT OUR CONNECTION ALLOWED ME YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF HOW YOU SHAPE THE ARMOR YOU WEAR
WHAT SAMANDAHL REY DOES WITH PHYSICAL FORM, YOU DO WITH THE BONDS OF MATTER ITSELF!
If we do have the foresight to anticipate the worst .
THANK YOU FOR THIS GIFT~
the opposite of ideal.
we can make preparations...

...to armor ourselves.
I WILL WEAR IT PROUDLY
Since nature is flawed, the ideal remains a notion, not a destination.
Perfection is unattainable at a mortal level.
But the striving for it...
...that can be done.

ILAHN?
ISN'T THAT--?
YES.
SEPHIE HAS CHEATED DEATH, BY SOME ASPECT OF THE SIGIL, I EXPECT
SHE HAS ALSO OVERPOWERED THE *OTHERS!*
AS WE *DISCUSSED*, THEN
YES.
SHE WILL NEVER ALLOW *HIM* TO COME TO HARM
UNNNH

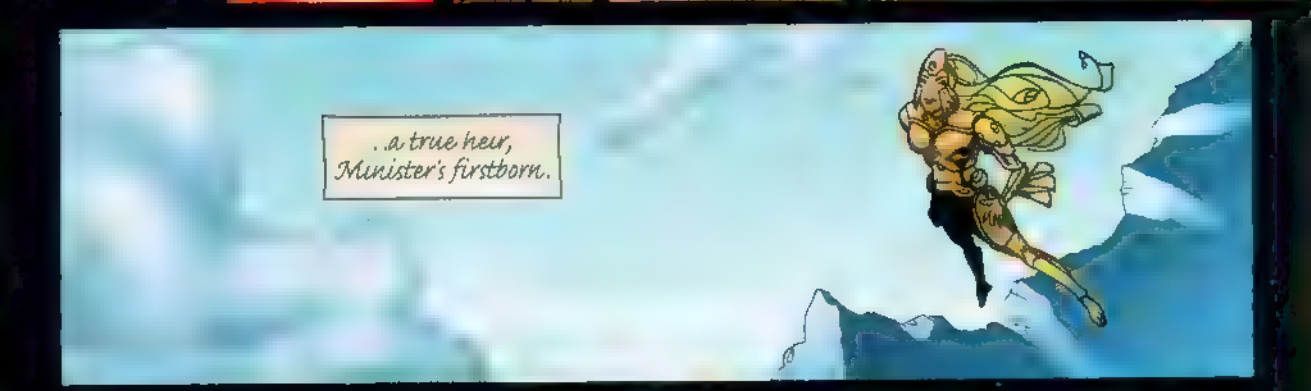
JAD!
JAD
SURPRISED?
BUT HOW?
I FELT YOU DISAPPEAR
I THOUGHT YOU WERE

DEAD
UHFFF!

I loved my uncle once.
Searching my heart now, I find no feeling except the warm memories of a little girl's adoration of her traveled and exotic relative.
Even so, it gives me no joy to cause him pain.
If pain even registers on his corrupted nerves anymore.

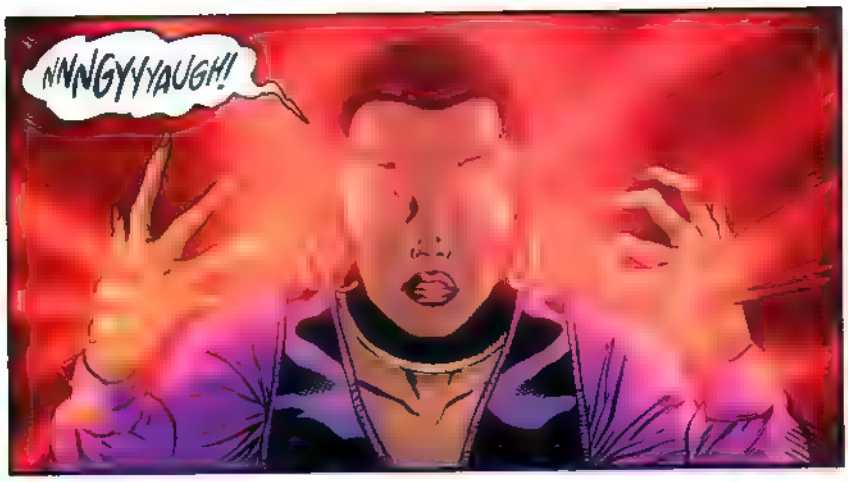
His grimace only reveals his determination to rid himself of trouble.
Me.
I prefer to believe that his twisted pursuit of me has a basis in caring...
because he shares my father's blood and is kin, if not kind.
IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW BRIGHTLY SHE SHINES--
THIS BATTLE WILL BE WON BY THE GREATER WILL
ILAHN'S EGO IS SO MUCH STRONGER THAN THAT OF YOUR LITTLE SEPHIE
YOU'RE SURE OF THAT?
IT LOOKS LIKE SEPHIE'S WINNING TO ME
BUT WHY AREN'T YOU IN THE FIGHT?
WHAT'S KEEPING YOU AWAY?
WHY, NOTHING

The conflict between us has roots deeper than our current struggle for control of Demetria's fate.
At its core lies legitimacy.
He may have power.
But I will always be what he can only dream of being...


..a true heir, Minister's firstborn.

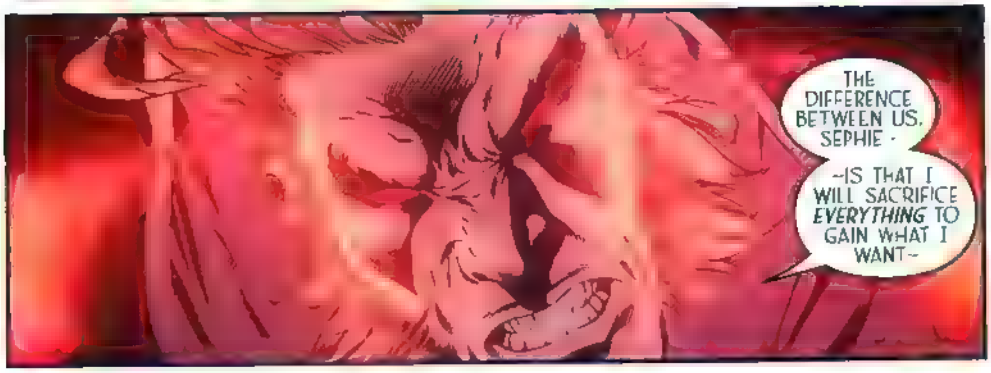
Ilahn's Ministry was gained by guile
He is forever the second-born son who must claim the right to rule, not assume it.
UNLIKE YOU, SEPHIE OF MERIDIAN--

-ILAHN IS NOT ALONE!
KLANNKKRHUMMP
NE.THER IS SEPHIE
YOU CHALLENGE ME, TAKARTY--
--POWERLESS AS YOU ARE?
POWER ISN'T ALWAYS A MATTER OF SHOW REESHA--
EVEN WHEN IT LOOKS GOOD!
ILAHN!
SURRENDER YOURSELF TO ME NOW!
I HAVE YOUR PARAMOUR IN MY SIGHTS!


NNNGYYYAUGH!

STARS ABOVE!
SEPHIE DID YOU DO THAT?
NO!

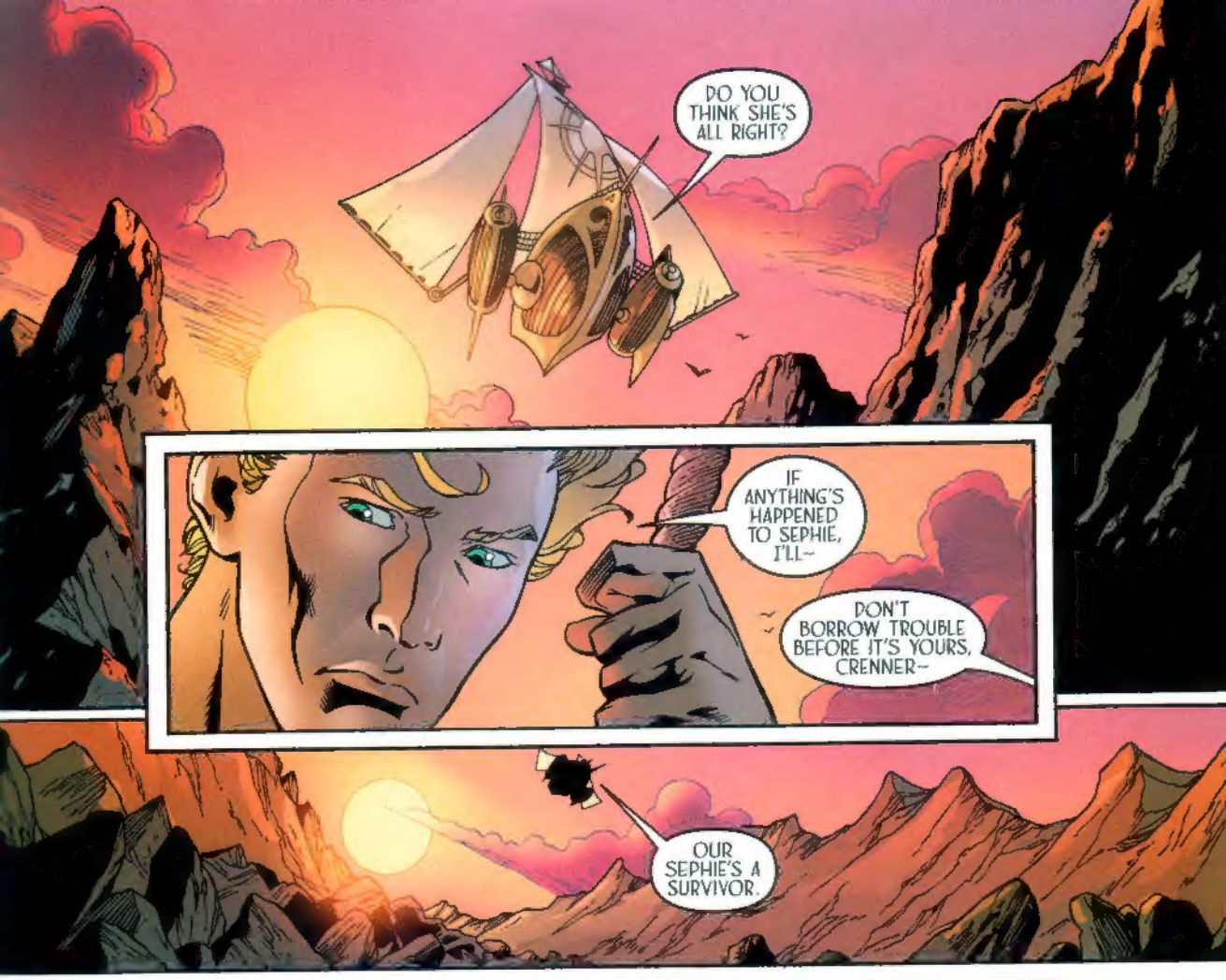
YOU STUPID CHILD
YOU CANNOT THREATEN ME
THERE IS NO PAIN OR LOSS YOU CAN SUGGEST THAT I WOULD NOT WILLINGLY RISK


THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN US, SEPHIE -
-IS THAT I WILL SACRIFICE EVERYTHING TO GAIN WHAT I WANT-

~WHILE YOU WOULD DIE IN ITS DEFENSE!
JAD· YOU CAN GET AWAY! I'VE GOT·
NO, SEPH·
-I'M NOT LEAVING YOUR SIDE AGAIN
I'M HERE UNTIL THE END
NOTHING SCARES YOU DOES IT?
SURE IT DOES

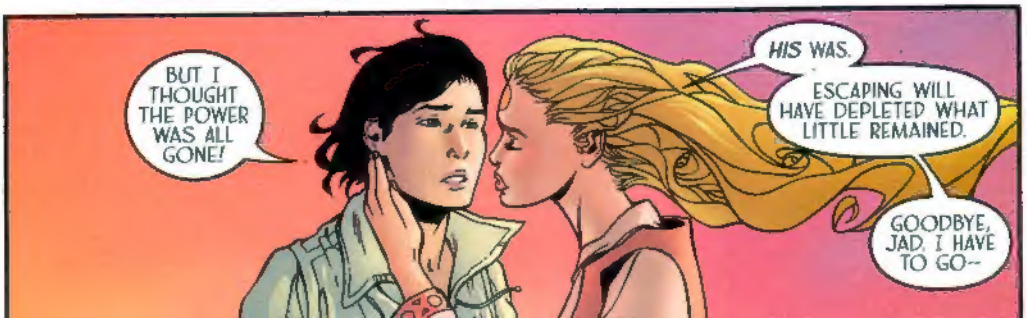
--I'M JUST MORE SCARED OF LOSING *YOU* AGAIN!
YOU WON'T
ILAHN *THINKS* HE HAS THE ADVANTAGE --
--BUT I KNOW SOMETHING HE DOESN'T
IT WON'T END HERE, JAD --
--I WON'T *LET* IT
NO! WHY DOES IT *FAIL?*
RRRAUGH!
STARS TAKE US!
WHERE HAS THE POWER GONE?
IT'S ALL GONE, ILAHN
CAN'T YOU FEEL IT FADING AWAY?

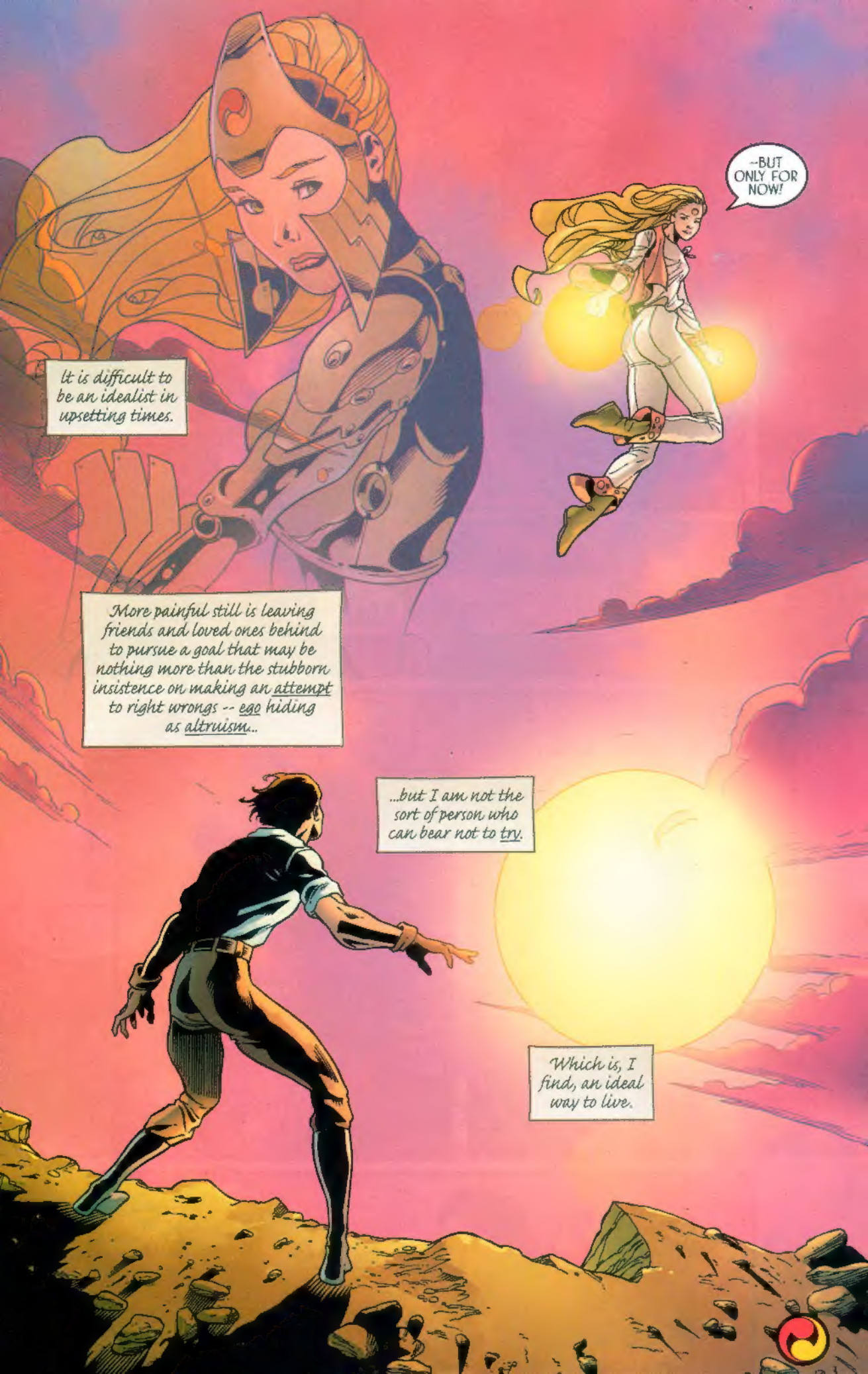
GONE? IT CAN'T! I WAS ASSURED--
WE'RE NEAR THE BLEAK ZONE. OUR PORTION OF THE UNIVERSE HELD ONLY A WEAK SUPPLY.
YOU BROUGHT THOSE *OTHER* SIGIL-BEARERS HERE AND BEGAN ALL THAT USELESS FIGHTING...
...SO WE USED IT ALL UP.
NOT *ALL*.
WITH WHAT SMALL SUPPLY I STILL POSSESS--
--I'LL BARTER FOR MORE!
YOU'LL HAVE ALL YOU DESIRE, ILAHN...
...SOON.
IT'S *OVER*?
JUST LIKE *THAT*?
UNTIL THE OTHERS WAKE UP, BUT I IMAGINE THEY'LL GO QUIETLY WITHOUT ILAHN'S INFLUENCE.
BUT I DON'T WANT TO THINK ABOUT *THAT* RIGHT NOW!
JUST *YOU*!
THAT'S A GREAT IDEA!


DO YOU THINK SHE'S ALL RIGHT?
IF ANYTHING'S HAPPENED TO SEPHIE, I'LL--
DON'T BORROW TROUBLE BEFORE IT'S YOURS, CRENNER--
OUR SEPHIE'S A SURVIVOR.

LOOK! SHE'S--!
SHE'S--
SHE'S NOT THE *ONLY* ONE.

IS THAT... *JAD?*
JAD, YOU HAVE TO GO WITH THEM.
SAY MY GOODBYES FOR ME. I HAVE TO LEAVE.
THERE'S SOMETHING I MUST DO--PAY THE PRICE FOR MY POWER.


BUT I THOUGHT THE POWER WAS ALL GONE!
HIS WAS.
ESCAPING WILL HAVE DEPLETED WHAT LITTLE REMAINED.
GOODBYE, JAD. I HAVE TO GO--


--BUT ONLY FOR NOW!
It is difficult to be an idealist in upsetting times.
More painful still is leaving friends and loved ones behind to pursue a goal that may be nothing more than the stubborn insistence on making an attempt to right wrongs -- ego hiding as altruism...
...but I am not the sort of person who can bear not to try.
Which is, I find, an ideal way to live.

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The CrossGen Universe created by Mark Alessi & Gina M. Villa

With this issue, MERIDIAN comes to an end, but the story of Sephie continues on wherever imagination leads you. My most heartfelt thanks go out to all the wonderful artists who have helped bring Sephie to life. The Daughter of Meridian has had a wonderful series of adventures, including the one she heads off toward now in NEGATION WAR. Thank you, readers, for journeying along with us.

— Barbara Kesel

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